

NEW

BLACK *AND* AFRICAN WRITING

Volume 2



General Editors

C. SMITH - GMT EMEZUE

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Prefatory Note



NEW BLACK AND AFRICAN WRITING Vol. 2 is our concluding edition of a series that has featured many critical entries and reviews on canonical African fiction, poetry, drama and non-fiction. With the unique concern with authors and their work we have moved beyond the texts and beyond conventional literary categorisations to investigate progress and aesthetics in African and African-American writings along fairly original and indigenous African philosophy, illuminating significant psychological, spiritual and ethical values that dominate centuries of ancient and modern African and African-American thought.

In our first volume we had noted that the celebration of Black writing in the fifties and sixties had seen her writers turning from old problems of colonialism and racial discrimination to new issues of political independence as scholars had earlier noted. The trend has survived twenty-first century African writing in its concern with the historical and political experiences of modern African republics. This second edition explores intricacies of

relationships and associations, the recurrent tropes for the interpretation and understanding of historical connections, and the shaping of thought brought into fictional and cultural renditions that are evolving and continually reassessed although around the periphery of older canons. Our lead essay, in this instance, shows how Toomer created a new idiom which allowed him to express the more immediate and intricate complexities of the African-American experience. In consonance, the new writings from Africa showcased in this volume may eventually provoke the desired curiosity about processes of literary tradition and genius within a motherhive of cultural legacies that have spanned several decades of creative virtuosity by Africa's prodigious talents. The quest for a meaningful heuristic for approaching contemporary arts is almost totally redefined by the contributions of eminent scholars of our time.

In line with the searchlight on rediscovery and revalidation of ancient values and traditions we have garnered insights into trans-national, racial, cultural and gender relations in which specific interests and problems are addressed with awareness of variety and difference. Thus we have thrown the light on issues of gender, history, language, nature and environment with the works envisioning the articulation of self and the reconstruction or contestation of history for communal uplifts and social transformation.

The comparisons of authors and their oeuvre which emerge from this historic enterprise satisfies the quest for diligent assessment of Africa's creative literature alongside vision, aesthetic and progress of the nationalities in varying shades of creative consciousness.

What has been called here an examination of literary cultures, whether of European, American or African antecedents, is as much profound as the vistas of artistic luminance regarding these ebullient crafts from our hemisphere. Such balancing and correspondence, as stated by an enlightened member of this forum, creates room for complementarity of values hopefully marking the forward movement toward cultural understanding and value appreciation in contemporary society.

Smith – Emezue

Chapter 1

Jean Toomer

Odhoji, B.

I

IN 1923 a new vision and artistic expression of the African-American people was born with the publication of Jean Toomer's experimental novel, *Cane*. A year earlier, Claude McKay's volume of poetry, *Harlem Shadows*, was among the first works by a black writer to be published in mainstream media. With the emergence of *Cane* Toomer offered a new quest for composite identities, ontological harmony and self-realization by the African-American within a fast changing socio-cultural and economic environment. *Cane* not only symbolically reflected this quest but in many ways appeared as a testimony of Toomer's own personal quest for spiritual fulfilment as a 'new American.' Toomer's craft as an artful and imaginative writer and the vision informing his quest as portrayed in *Cane* "found in symbolism a means of breaching the narrow constraints of conventional language" and by combining mysticism and literary naturalism, he sought to portray "human continuity" with

“organic nature” (Huggins 180). In this light *Cane* could be appreciated as a harbinger of the Renaissance and an avant-garde aesthetic which first perceptively illuminated significant psychological and ethical values soon to dominate much of African-American writings of the 1920s and beyond. Unlike earlier writers, notably Countee Cullen, who advocated for racial unity by seeking a connection to Africa, Jean Toomer created a new idiom which allowed him to express the more immediate and intricate complexities of the African-American experience. Rejecting the ‘primitivist’ and ‘atavistic’ motifs of Cullen, he resorted to a kind of existentialist approach, writing about “man as the centre of his own destiny” (Dorris 122). Thus *Cane* could also be appreciated as an “experiment in self-revelation, the expression of a quest for identity which does not shrink from facing the chaos at the bottom of the human soul” (Gysin 39).

Cane comprises poems, sketches, episodic stories and dramatic passages. Is it a novel? Does it reflect the tradition of cohesive thematic and structural unity? What kind of historic conditions inspired its construction? A clearer perception of these issues calls for, first, an appreciation of Toomer’s life and career.¹

II

To characterize and categorize the writer is just as elusive as to categorize the text within the current conventional literary genre and traditions. Toomer’s life is enigmatic and reflects an eclectic spiritual quest for a harmonious ontology and self-fulfilment Born Nathan

Eugene Toomer on Dec. 26th 1894, he later became known merely as Jean Toomer in literary circles. Son of Nathan Toomer, “the illegitimate Mulatto son of a wealthy, white North Carolina landholder”, he glamorized his father whom he scarcely knew as an elegant wealthy plantation owner in Georgia (Lewis 60). His mother, Nina, was the daughter of an African-American civil rights crusader, Pickney B. S. Pinchback, who once served as acting governor of Louisiana before moving from New Orleans to Washington D.C. in 1890. Nina married the older Toomer against her father’s wishes as the husband hoped the wife could finance his extravagances. On realizing that Nina’s family fortunes were controlled by her father Nathan deserted her, leaving her with a lot of debts -an allegation which Jean Toomer was later to spiritedly contest.

Nina returned with the year old son, Jean, to stay with her parents in a relatively affluent neighbourhood. Blaming his grandfather for his father’s disappearance, Toomer derived comfort from his maternal Uncle Bismarck - the latter he often perhaps subconsciously substituted for a father. Nina married Coombs in 1905 and moved with the young Toomer to Brooklyn. After an unsuccessful effort to live with his stepfather whom he heartily despised the eleven year old Toomer returned to Washington to live with his uncle Bismarck. Four years after her re-marriage, Nina died from complications following an appendectomy. With a depleting savings account, the Pinchback family moved into an African-American neighborhood in Washington’s U Street where the young Toomer’s complex racial awakenings began.

Toomer joined Dunbar high -a school for the children of elite African-Americans but fifteen years later would deny strongly his identification with this race, claiming that his grandfather had been a white man who feigned African ancestry for political expediencies in Louisiana during the Reconstruction. After sailing through high school where he spent three and a half years with no hitches except an “avalanche of sexual indulgences in his second year that undermined his health,” Toomer became disgusted with himself feeling more and more isolated and nurturing an innate mysticism (62). In 1914 he joined the University of Wisconsin to study agriculture. During this time, he formulated most of his views concerning his racial composition and attitudes. He was later to write:

In my body were many bloods, some dark blood, all blended in the fire of six or more generations. I was, then, either a new type of man or the very oldest. In any case, I was inescapably myself... fourteen years of my life. I had lived in the white group, four years I had lived in the colored group. In my experience there had been no main difference between the two. (qtd in Turner 125)

He was soon repelled by agriculture studies and left at the close of the fall term. Attempts to register at the Massachusetts College of Agriculture were dropped as he decided to concentrate on his athletic abilities and body building, consequently enrolling in the American college of Physical Training in Chicago. Soon dissatisfied with prospects of being a mere gym instructor, in the fall of 1916, he registered for biology courses at the University of Chicago to prepare for a career in medicine. At this

time, his attention was drawn to and he wholeheartedly embraced socialism which, in his own words, “evoked and promised to satisfy all in me that had been groping for form amid the disorder and chaos of my personal experience” (126). Inspired by Clarence Darrow’s lecture whose atheism shattered Toomer’s former concept of a religious universe, he managed soon to secure a room at his college where he gave evening lectures on socialism, evolution, Victor Hugo, the intelligence of women etc. The lectures on the intelligence of women ended because his concepts offended female listeners. He had sought to emphasize the importance of liberating women from restrictions imposed by society. His thesis stated that “Woman is heart and intuition whereas Man is mind and logic. An appropriate relationship of man and woman therefore fuses the separate entities into a functioning totality” (127). Some of these ideas were later to be expressed in some of his literary pieces contained in *Cane*.

Returning to Washington after getting dissatisfied with studies in Chicago, Toomer soon convinced himself that a doctorate degree was a prerequisite for scholarly life. He therefore, enrolled for Sociology in 1917 at the New York University and almost immediately found the course dull. He enrolled for History classes instead at the City College of New York. Disillusioned by the slow comprehension of his less mature classmates he speculated studying Psychology but dropped this in order to serve during World War 1. Rejected because of an athletic injury, Toomer settled for selling Ford automobiles in Chicago and next conducted instructions on physical education in Milwaukee, finally settling in New York in 1918 with

Acher, Merrall and Conduit Company. During this time he practiced writing literary articles, then believing music to be a more natural form of expression he indulged in its study. He broke down after intensive work serving also as an instructor in physical education at the University settlement. While recuperating in 1918 he developed a mania for writing. After a hectic period marked by, among other things, abortive efforts to teach socialism to shipyard workers, and being introduced into Waldo Frank's literary circle, he eventually returned to Washington in 1920 to settle on a writing career.

Jean Toomer studied the literature of Waldo Frank, Sherwood Anderson, Robert Frost, etc. He also embraced Buddhist philosophy, Eastern teachings, Christian scriptures and Occultism. He wrote a number of essays, article and poems most of which he never submitted for publication. When in late summer 1921 he was invited to serve temporarily as head of an industrial and agricultural school in Sparta, Georgia, (later to have parallels with "Kabnis") Toomer began to immerse himself in African-American consciousness more deeply than ever before. In a letter to "The Liberator" he was to write:

I am naturally and inevitably an American. I have strived for a spiritual fusion analogous to the fact of racial intermingling. Without denying a single element in me, with no desire to subdue one to the other, I have sought to let them function as complements. I have tried to let them live in harmony...my growing need for a artistic expression has pulled me deeper and deeper into the Negro group...It has stimulated and fertilized whatever

creative talent I may contain within me... Now I cannot conceive of myself as aloof and separated. (128-129)

While on a train to Washington Toomer began writing sketches on his Georgia experiences and sent the articles to number of magazines and journals. These were later to form the bigger part of *Cane*. After a consultation with Waldo Frank Toomer proposed a book for his work:

Now I wanted a book published... because it would be a substantial statement of my achievement and also because I felt that it would lead me... into the world of writers and literature” (Turner 129). Along a similar vein, Toomer intimated, “But I had not enough for a book.... It seemed that I had said all I had to say about it (Georgia). So, what then? I’d fill out. The middle section of *Cane* was thus manufactured. (129)

This therefore raises certain problems of literary scholarship for Jean Toomer. Is *Cane* a novel? Is there unity? If the writer had thus ‘filled out’ the middle section for publication requirements, what is the significance and status of that section in realizing the total effect of the text?³

Before delving further into the above issues, it is imperative to point out that Toomer visited France after publishing *Cane*, was involved in and deeply influenced by Gurdjieff Institute, and married a member of his Chicago group, Margery Latimer, in 1931 while conducting courses on communal living and spiritual growth in Portage, Wisconsin. Margery died in 1932 during childbirth and Toomer married Marjorie Content -

his life long wife until his death on March 30th 1967. Toomer also published collections of literary articles such as “Blue Meridian” and “Winter on Earth” before abandoning fiction and drama in 1940 to restrict himself to poetry, reviews and autobiographies. He continued to write philosophical essays throughout his life and “continued to search for harmony and self-realization in East Indian religions, in the Friends Society and in psychoanalysis” (Turner 138). Hence while Toomer, the writer, spent most of his life in quest of a harmonious ontology, his text *Cane*, from a symbolic and avant-gardist point of view, reflects the quest of an ontological harmony in an artistic sense.

III

There is a definite triadic ontology in the construction of *Cane*. This expresses itself in a number of ways ranging from the setting, thematic concerns, character development to structural and stylistic construction. Conflicts and tensions develop between oppositions in quest of a kind of synthesis and harmony. Thematically, this expresses itself in such oppositions as sensuality and robotism, primitivism and modernism, sensation and perception etc. Synthesis is developed as a kind of quest for spiritual awakening. Structurally this is enhanced by a quest for a cyclical unity, a merging of two arcs, a quest for viable lyrical expressions within ‘artificially’ constructed linguistic conventions and artistic forms. These provide the movement of the text as Toomer offers no clear-cut solutions but suggests a degree of awakening consciousness for the new individual emerging from the

merging of Africa and America. The world of *Cane* moves from southern Georgia setting to the north in Washington D.C. and Chicago and back again to the south. This, itself, is suggestive of the quest for triadic ontology, which “brought his scattered parts together” (Mckay 331)

The text is divided into three main sections. The first section comprises six ‘vignettes’ about rural life in the south interspersed with short lyric poems. This section constitutes what Dorris calls “the female cycle” (30). Focus is principally on women heroines. There is a definite missing link (incompleteness) in every sketch which is suggestive of the tensions apparent in two opposing worlds in quest for ontological harmony.

“Karintha”, described as “carrying beauty, perfect as dusk when the sun goes down,” is the object of attraction for both young and old men. Her soul is “a growing thing ripened too soon.” Here is a story of a premature sexual awakening and debasement of innocence -victim of the threatening world of her male admirers with their capitalistic abundance. The conflict here is between innocent spiritually set against the materialistic avarice of a capitalistic system which threatens to turn that innocence into a commodity. The other level of conflict is realized in the worlds of the young and that of the old men in quest for possession of Karintha’s love. Humanism is set against a faceless materialistic instinct. It is pertinent to note that this latter world manages to a certain degree to contaminate and corrupt the former without overwhelming it completely.

Conflicting paradigms revolving around a central trope is also apparent in “Carma,” “Fern” and “Blood-Burning

Moon.” The quest for triadic ontology in “Carma” operates at the level of conflict between the individual freedom set against societal marital values and laws. Like Karintha, Carma, is the object of desire. She indulges in adultery thereby going against the norms of her society symbolized here by her husband. The husband kills a man in a fit of anger and humiliation ending up in prison. He pays the price of being the upholder of ‘abstract’ repressive values of the society. The quest, in this instance, is realized in the conflict between social conventions set against the individual freedom of choice. Carma, like Karintha, operates symbolically as the third vital arc within the triadic quest. “Esther” is as sensuous as Carma and, like her, also required to repress her personal individual desires and freedom. Society has conspired against her deeply felt longings for Barlo. Incompleteness remains her fate. One would point out the levels of conflict here as represented by Esther set against “whatever people might say” (*Cane* 25). Fundamentally, the conflict operates at the level of human sensual feelings; human passion set against ‘artificially’ constructed super-personal forces and norms.

Conflict between two worlds and failure of the attempts to synchronize them seems to be the defining principle not only in the three sketches pointed out but also in “Becky.” Becky’s is a world set in between two other racially constructed worlds of white and black folks. The white folks view her as a “Good-forsaken, insane white shameless wench,” while the black world sees her as a “poor Catholic, poor crazy woman” for bearing a black son (7). Both worlds consider miscegenation, the greatest outrage. Becky ends up being cast out of the two

worlds, but it is significant that in spite of her action, individuals from the two worlds secretly bring her foodstuffs in her exclusion. Here then lies another level of conflict -that between society and individual norms and values. And here lies Toomer's comment on 'race' and 'racism' as a social construction which ideally only helps to repress the individual persons' freedom. Becky ends up being buried in her cabin. Incompleteness or failure to bridge the gap between the two worlds is realized. Like Carma and Karintha, Becky is the third arc within this triadic structure -a metaphor suggestive of Toomer's vision of the new American as a blending of the old races.

The quest for ontological harmony in "Blood-Burning Moon" is symbolically expressed in the worlds of Bob Stone and Tom Burwel. Again, there is comment on race and racism. Both White and black worlds are set against each other with Louisa acting as the metaphor -the object of desire. Attempts to handle and bring the two worlds into agreement are unsuccessful as her black lover ends up being burnt at a stake in the cotton factory. A similar situation obtains in "Fern" where Fernie -a product of a Jewish father and black mother is the centre of attraction for the men of her town and the narrator who comes in from another town. These are three worlds of the triadic structure. Fern eventually faints when the narrator attempts to break through her world. Again there is an attempt and failure suggestive of the quest for unity and harmony as is the case in the other sketches.

It is significant that Toomer employs women characters in this section. First, what links them is their being seen as objects of desire and sexual gratification. Their worlds represent and is characterized by human

passion, sensual feelings, and it is a world set against that of men who fail to recognize their humanity and, instead, perceive them merely from a lustful perspective. Hence the world of human feelings and passion is set against a materialistic mined world devoid of human feelings.

Secondly, by making his heroines and what they represent stand out as the fulcrum of the sketches, Jean Toomer gives precedence to human passion as opposed to the robotic and materialistic considerations which are, in the main, inconsequential to the ontological harmony of the being of being human. His statement of the primacy of the individual human freedom and choice stands out against societal norms and conventions.

The fate of the six southern women, in a nutshell, reflects Toomer's concerns with socially defined caste systems, repression of the individual sensual feelings and freedom of choice. Emphasis on the fate of the women and their sexuality is a deliberate design by which Toomer is able to comment on the significance of women as custodians of life-giving forces and, therefore, the locus of a new rebirth, a new hope for spiritual fulfilment and ontological harmony of the individual person.

The sketches of the section are interwoven with short lyric poems, two after every sketch. These poems as cohesive devices and create particular moods -which reinforce the haunting, religious pathos. There is evident quest for wholeness, for harmony and fruition. The feminine lives, though potentially productive, are limited, condemned to silence by external forces which regard their procreative powers as articles of trade and sexual exploitation.

Toomer's characters are set against a backdrop of potentially productive natural space which is under the threat of 'darkness.' Nature is under the looming threat of mechanized human activity based on profit motive. It is the twilight of a beautiful lady, pine trees stand like monuments and the inorganic saw-mill turns them sawdust. Pine trees here are symbolic of the women and their world. The saw-mill, on the other hand, represents the world of the men in quest of regenerative agencies.

The general mood is one of pessimism suggested by 'dusk'-the principal leitmotif of the section. As Catherine Innes observes, "dusk represents a moment of fusion of dark and light, of past and future, a mingling of colors - the moment when it is neither day nor night but both" (154). There is the "sound of steel on stones" as reapers sharpen their scythes. This suggests preparations for harnessing the natural world for economic profit motives. There is the "November Cotton Flower" under the threat of the boll-weevil. 'November' suggests the nearness of an end, the closing of a year, and the twilight of beauty of the women. This is the same image conjured in "Evening song" -a suggestion of impending gloom. "Dusk" is the metaphor for the connecting principle between, the natural, humane, sensual world of the woman and the artificial, mechanized and sterile world on the verge of devastating it. "Dusk" is also the connecting symbol between section one and two of *Cane*. As Gysin notes, in the case of Toomer, "imagery performs the function that the plot performs in a novel or a play, it connects the various incidents, in the case of *Cane*, the poems, sketches, and episodes" (38-39).

If Section One is the feminine world, then the second section is the masculine world. Toomer shifts the setting from the South to North in Washington D.C. and Chicago. This section focuses on spiritually destructive modern industrial complexes which have been shown as a threat in the first section. The sensual atmosphere of the previous gives way to sterility and quest for a humanizing agency. As Huggins observes, “the threat to humanity here is in people’s attachment to inorganic objects and property.... Inanimate symbols command most of these stories” (184).

The individual solos of the South are not heard here. This is a world of “Cadillacs, whizzing down the street-car-tracks,” a world where “money burns the pocket” (*Cane* 41). The artificiality of this world is suggested by the name “Rhobert” which suggests ‘robot’ humans drained of all feelings. The same sterility is evident in both “Theater” and “Box Seat” whose very titles, as the stories they relate, reflect socially constructed norms and pretensions. At a theater, normally, there is action which only reflects the truth but is not truthful. Human beings are reduced to mere actors and pretenders by an artificial world that has destroyed their true humane feelings. There is no hope for a harmonious ontology of being human since in this world, people behave as if they are without a soul. In “Calling Jesus” -a comment on the need for redemption- a character’s soul is compared to a whimpering dog calling for attention while following its owner. Authentic individual freedom is betrayed both in “Avey” where the heroine Avey is denied her need for expression, as well as in “Bona and Paul” where the

southern white girl, Bona betrays her actual authentic desire for Paul -a Mulatto student.

The ‘arc’ preceding the section symbolises the quest for completeness just as in the first section. Doris observes that the curve of *Cane* in part one “constitutes the female cycle and part two constitutes the male cycle” (71). Whereas both sections reflect the quest for spiritual harmony, there is so much hope in Section Two where Toomer seems more concerned with the mechanical urban setting which churns out robots instead of human beings. Emphasis is on the spiritually destructive urban values where individuality and a sense of self as a complete and composite entity are denied. There is the quest for spiritual agencies to humanize the mechanical structures. There is the quest for flesh and blood for the skeletal robots hence the arc’s failure or incompleteness to make a full circle. There is need for the empty, sterile and uprooted souls to seek flesh and blood in the ‘soil’ in the south. This is the quest for reawakening which informs the last section of *Cane*.

The semi-dramatic story of Kabnis -a northern Mulatto who goes to teach in rural Georgia- is a symbolic re-establishment of contact between the North and the South. The “stifled spirit” of the north is set against the “lyrical beauty” of the south. The character of Kabnis not only serves as the metaphor for the quest for ontological harmony found in the humanising agencies of the south, but also reflects the very triadic structure and symbolic positions of the woman of the first section. Like Karintha, Becky, Carma etc, Kabnis is the pivotal centre seeking to join two worlds standing in opposition to each other. Again, it is symbolic that Kabnis is a male Southerner

whose life in the North has cut him from his roots. Kabnis is, therefore, the very symbol of the quest for spiritual nurturance of the robot-like North. Kabnis is Toomer's statement on the need for spiritual regeneration of the artless male world of the first and second sections. As Doris comments:

This part of Toomer's work sketches a search for identity and a spirit of play as an essential part of man's experience. Etched between the converging patterns of celebration and sorrow, man becomes fully himself, ascending the stairways of dawn to stand before the rising sun. "Kabnis" is a reestablishment of contact and communion of man with his roots, the achievement of a new sense of life and creativity, and resurrection from the death that overwhelms the spirit. (96)

In a series of episodes Kabnis is portrayed as drifting with no sense of self, culminating in his being thrown into an underground cellar where he derives emotional support from prostitutes.⁴ Here also sits Father John (representing the old attachment to roots) an old blind and deaf man served by a young girl, Carrie Kate. Meeting Father John is symbolic as Kabnis comes face to face with his historical and cultural roots. But the fact that Father John is blind and deaf also points to Toomer's vision of the disappearing glorious past. Redemption is through Kate and Lewis who acknowledge and accept the old man. In them lies the promise where "the new generation may find roots and sustenance, vitality and manhood" (Huggins 186).

It is significant that Kate assists Kabnis out of the basement and that this rise from the cellar the next morning “coincides with the ‘birth-song’ that the early morning sun sends through the branches of the trees into the streets of the sleeping town” (McKay 333). Coming to the South as a ‘teacher’ is turned upside as Kabnis becomes the student who “learns the collective history of African-Americans...and discovers his place in that history.” (McKay 333). The novel then ends on an optimistic note as the “sun arises...shadows of pines are dreams... (like) gold-glowing child, it steps into the sky and sends a birth-song...” (*Cane* 117).

The quest for African-American identity, according to Toomer therefore, lies in one’s roots in the homeland in the South. It is to look into the past without fear without shame and accept the past. It is precisely to accept a relationship to the “black, gnarled, ugly, brutalized slave” that is Father John (Huggins 186). Toomer is quoted as having said: “From my own point of view, I am naturally inevitably an American. I have strived for a spiritual fusion analogous to the fact of racial intermingling” (quoted in Turner 128). This is reflected in the kind of fusion, the kind of insight Kabnis attains. And indeed, Kabnis is Toomer himself for “if anything comes up now, pure Negro, it will be a swan-song...Kabnis is me” (*Cane* 51). Structurally, “Kabnis” suggests the quest for fusion between the emotional and intellectual, between the south and North, between parts one and two of *Cane*. According to Frank, “Color, spiritual penetration, counterpoint of human wills, the intuition... are harmonic of a Unit...all here, but not the final art...Kabnis is however, very near to its state of fusing” (159). This explains the symbolic

nature of the two arcs preceding “Kabnis” and further suggests the quest and hope for ontological harmony suggested by Toomer. For harmony to be attained, for the circle to be complete, “there must be a welding into one personality of Kabnis and Lewis: the great emotionalism of the race guided and directed by a great purpose and super-intelligence” (Gregory 168). Perhaps it is in this sense that Toomer’s avant-garde aesthetic of the Harlem Renaissance was later to influence other subsequent writers from Langston Hughes through Ralph Ellison, Toni Morrison and Ishmael Reed. Jean Toomer therefore represents an ontological harmony through the acceptance of roots however ugly, a realization of the self as the ultimate abode of composite spiritual identities and redemptive nurturance. As Braithwaite observes:

in Jean Toomer, we come upon the very first artist of the race, who with all an artist’s passion and sympathy for life, its hurts, its sympathies, its desire, its defeats and strange yearnings, can write about the Negro without the surrender or compromise of the artist’s vision...Cane is a book of gold and bronze, of dusk and flame, of ecstasy and pain, and Jean Toomer is a bright morning star of a new day of the ‘race’ in literature. (44)

Chapter 2

Ngugi's Poetics

Shang, GN

I

THE issue of language has been a central question in Ngugi's texts, essays, lectures, and civic activism. Ngugi's engagement with language is based on a Fanonian premise that the use of the imperial language entails a symbolic appropriation of its world view, a process that alienates the writer and the (post)colonial subject from his socio-cultural milieu: "To speak means to be in a position to use a certain syntax, to grasp the morphology of this or that language, but it means above all to assume a culture, to support the weight of civilization" (Fanon 17). As a writer who seeks to represent the consciousness of the oppressed peripheral voices in the postcolonial polity, Ngugi has, especially in *Decolonising the Mind*, forcefully and consistently argued in favour of the use of African language by the African writer as a necessary means of negotiating his Africanity and his unity with his people.

Although he follows up his ideology by writing most of his works after *Petals of Blood* in Kikuyu, Ngugi never eschewed English language as a medium of literary expression. His Kikuyu written works have ultimately been followed by their English versions. The present text, *Wizard of the Crow* was first written in Kikuyu before being translated by the author himself into English. Unlike some francophone African writers (for example Sony Labou Tansi and Ahmadou Kourouma) who have sought to disfigure the colonial language and 're-occupy' its epistemic system, Ngugi's expression in *Wizard of the Crow* is not defined by any such intention to inflect the English language. Our focus on his language therefore addresses his representation of the power to name, to order and to ordain character/events and how such a system contributes to the author's conception of the subject and the community.

For Ngugi therefore naming constitutes an important aspect of his representation of language, power and worldview. A major trait of Ngugi's *Wizard of the Crow* is the capacity to condition existence through naming and to provide the frame through which events, persons and processes are perceived. A name does not only address what is named, it redresses, restitutes it and re-defines its relationship with other entities in the world. We would therefore base this essay on the proclivity of the text to dispute, contest and reconstitute names in the negotiation of power relations within the postcolonial society. From this perspective, a name is not only a noun, it is a metaphor, a conceit, an allegory and a narrative that determines the course/cause of the character/event along the plotline of the text. To 're-name' is therefore to

review, to revisit the trajectory, to re-plot the narrative and to re-cast what is renamed in a new image. In Ngugi's artistic frame, the name sets man into motion and through this, a new subject is born in the fulfillment of a destiny that is not only personal but equally and more importantly communal. We approach the question of 'naming' in *Wizard of the Crow* as an important factor in the understanding of subjectivity, collective consciousness, textual tonality and artistic vision.

In order to understand the system of naming in Ngugi's text, it is important to examine the author's self re-naming. It is not a rare practice for African authors to repudiate their Western-Christian names. However, it is the significance behind the re-naming that calls for critical analysis. In *Wizard of the Crow*, when Kamiti pretends to cure Tajirika of the speech malady of "ifs" and to exorcise him of his desire of to become a White man, he warns the latter: "A slave first loses his name, then his language. So Mr. Clarence Whitehead, you now know what to do next. Your language. Give it up." (182). This parody captures Ngugi's symbolic association of the question of language and naming to the bigger issue of identity and cultural imperialism. Eschewing the colonial name and re-naming the self is a symbolic exoneration of the colonial consciousness and cultural emaciation that the name evokes. In a cultural system where naming carries immense cultural signification and where the name putatively reflects its reference, naming constitutes an important aspect of the re-negotiation of self-identity and community construction in Ngugi's literary imagination. 'James Ngugi' rejected the Christian name 'James' which he considered as a mark of English colonialism and its

Greco-Roman cultural corollary; a symbolic renunciation of colonial mentality. The renaming is therefore meant to position the author as the cultural voice of his community against (neo) colonialism. Self-renaming therefore represents a symbolic re-unification of the author with his community and its cultural memory. Through the poetics and politics of naming, Ngugi seeks to articulate the subject's condition of subjugation under neo-colonialism, cultural imperialism and capitalism. Even though Ngugi has consistently criticized Christianity, it is rather impossible to analyze his works without an in-depth grasp of the Biblical names and parables (Nazareth 13). His works are draped in Biblical metaphors, parables and allusions (and illusions). Moreover, biblical knowledge is necessary in the understanding of his vision of salvation, redemption and social regeneration.

Naming and Collective Consciousness

The process of individual and group consciousness is impossible to analyse without an adequate understanding of the system of naming of characters. The eponymous *Wizard of the Crow* is called "Kamiti," a name that seems benign to its bearer at the beginning but which gradually becomes the basis on which his relationship with the self and the outside world is negotiated. As the text unfolds, the pregnant nature of the name 'Kamiti' and its symbolic complexity take shape as the character undergoes various levels of transformations. "Kamiti" changes his identity in various episodes in the novel ranging from mistaken identity to quackery and simulacra. When the Wizard of the Crow¹ travels to New York as the State witch-doctor

to ‘heal’ the Ruler from the strange illness of ‘self-induced expansion’, he is identified as “Abdi Manga” for security reasons (503). This is an attempt by the Ruler’s government to conceal the fact that they are making recourse to magical powers to salvage the health of the ailing president. By re-naming Kamiti, they attempt to symbolically possess him so that his simulated magical powers can advance the course of the dictatorial regime. However, Kamiti uses his closeness with the centre of power to subvert the system and foster the agenda of the Movement for the voice of the people which organizes protests against the regime.

As a character whose identity vacillates according to the context in which he finds himself, Kamiti is the lifeline of the tortuous plot of Ngugi’s novel. When he returns from India with an MBA, Kamiti roams the streets of Eldares hopelessly searching for a job. Dejected and guilty of his incapacity to honour his family that has sacrificed so much for his education, he gives in to alcoholism as a form of escapism and psychological relief:

Now he turned his pockets inside out and found enough to take to the counter. May be if he tossed down two or three beers he would feel good, he would at least forget the turn his life had taken. (68)

Tipsy from alcohol and wrecked by disillusion and shame, he decides to throw himself onto the garbage heap. However, when the garbage collectors come to clear the filth, Kamiti incidentally regains full consciousness and suddenly ‘arises from death,’ to the shock of the

former who flee in shock and awe. The garbage collectors spread the news that they have met the ‘devil’ on the garbage heap. This leads to the ‘spiritual warfare’ against the devil by the ‘Soldiers of Christ’ of Santalucia. On the level of the main plot, Kamiti’s ‘re-awakening marks the beginning of his determined efforts to survive which would later lead him into the practice of quackery/divination, enabling him to ignite power struggles between ministers who visit his shrine for better political appointments. Ngugi’s parody of Judeo-Christian myth of re-birth is therefore central in the story of *Wizard of the Crow*. This incident is pregnant with dramatic irony. Even though the garbage collectors and the Soldiers of Christ consider Kamiti as the devil’s incarnate leading to their illusory and ludicrous crusade against his spirit, Kamiti represents the opposite in the narrative texture of Ngugi’s text. In Christlike imagery, Kamiti represents the spirit of survival and regeneration amidst a dehumanizing system. Kamiti represents the regenerated spirit of an oppressed people, a fact he would only learn later in the novel.

With the woe brought to his family by politics, Kamiti’s consciousness dithers on a sense of helplessness, victimhood and disillusion. Same as Wanja in Ngugi’s *Petals of Blood* who comes to the Machiavellian conclusion that in post-independence Kenya, “you either eat or you are eaten” (72), Kamiti comes to the verge of losing faith in social morality. However, if Wanja can use his womanhood as a means of survival, Kamiti has nothing on which to fall back. His transformation is therefore typical of Ngugi’s archetypal heroes, who border on the precipice of resignation, defeatism and

nihilism, just to come back more convicted and determined to fight for social justice. In Karega's² case, we are told: "He came very close to the fatal mistake of losing faith in the people and in the possibilities of truth and beauty and ideals in a world where people were daily struggling for bread and water: But he heard the voice of Wanja and Abdullah calling from a sudden plunge in the slough..." (253). While Karega's full consciousness and comprehension of the history of (neo) colonial oppression takes root during the odyssey to Ilmorog when he meets the lawyer, Kamiti makes an inverse trajectory to his native village. In *Wizard of the Crow*, Ngugi's Kamiti undergoes a similar transformation of consciousness. Prior to this journey and his meeting with Nyawira, Kamiti is apolitical, a result of bitter family memories:

His aversion to political engagement, especially mass movements, was shaped by the experiences of his family. His father, once a primary school teacher, had lost his job because of his attempt to unionize teachers in his area. And his grandfather had died in the war of independence. Political struggles had brought his family only misery, and he wanted nothing to do with them. Was it not ironic, then, that the very politics he had so pointedly tried to avoid were now being forced on him by the actions of others? (129)

In the background of disillusionment, Kamiti is later going to discover the seed of hope and the fountain of energy necessary for the continuation of the communal struggle. His journey to the village constitutes a moment of introspection, a voyage into the self, the family, clan

and the society that would grant him insight into the history of slavery, colonialism, neo-colonialism (294). Moreover, what appears to him as a history of failure would be re-plotted along the lines of inspiration and hope. When he confides to his parents the news of his practice of divination, he is troubled by the fear that they would repudiate him in their expectation of a befitting and income-generating job. Contrariwise, his father perceives in his twist of fate the fulfillment of a prophecy. He narrates the life of his grandfather, Kamiti wa Kienjeku, his role in the liberation struggle, his gift of healing and his dedication to the service of his community.

The fact that Kamiti is born ‘holding a shell’ (295) foretells his divine ‘election.’ It confides on the child a spiritual mission: to re-unite the present with the ancestral spirit and culture of struggle, a major motif in the literary culture of Ngugi wa Thiong’o. The name Ka-Miti (294-5) means “child of the Miti clan”, a community that was wrecked apart in the colonial days by the British conquest. Kamiti’s journey to the village ends in the parental blessing for his practice of herbal treatment and his transformation from a state of parochial individualism to the level of spiritual consciousness and *Weltanschauung* of his community. From this perspective, *Wizard of the Crow* can be considered as *Bildungsroman* since it is developed along a narrative of progressive self-awareness and individual and group consciousness.

Through a reading of Kenya’s independence struggle, it can be postulated that ‘Kamiti’ reflects the transfigured anagram of Dedan Kimathi, the charismatic head of the Kenya Land and Freedom Army popularly known as “Mau Mau” that fought against British colonialism. The

image of Kimathi is an underlining myth that knits the variety of Ngugi's fictional and theatrical productions. Ngugi mythologizes the freedom fighter and inscribes him in an expanded temporality within the aesthetics of transcendence and Phoenix-like re-generation. In another dimension, the name 'Kamiti' also re-echoes the (in)famous prison house in Kenya where most of the Kenyan politicians were imprisoned under the heinous regime of Arap Moi.

The symbolic death and eventual resurrection of Kamiti could reflect a history of resilience, re-birth and renewal of the nation, which the Movement of the Voice of the People commemorates towards the end of the text. Thus, Ngugi's naming system represents a quest for unity, resistance and defiance against forces of exploitation and oppression. With the re-membering of the death of the nationalist fighters and the struggles of the new generations, Ngugi establishes a culture of resistance that continuously resurfaces and transcends various historical temporalities.

It is impossible to analyze the character of Kamiti without that of Nyawira. If his father educates him on the spiritual and metaphysical dimension of his character, it is the female figure of Nyawira that participates in broadening Kamiti's 'social' consciousness. Before meeting her "he was unaccustomed to making connections between his woes and those of the community at large" (6). This point is important because if Kamiti represents the history of resistance, Nyawira, the female Janus-face of Wizard of the Crow,³ epitomizes social consciousness across various classes and communities. This gives a symbolic value to their

friendship and the innuendo of their marriage towards the end of the text. In the same way as Ast and Asar in Armah's *Osiris Rising*, the sexual act that they intermittently perform constitutes a ritual of unity in the fight against oppression. It fuses the two characters into the equivocal voice/face of the Wizard of the Crow. When AG re-visits the shrine of the Wizard during Kamiti's trip to the village, he is addressed by a female voice. He leaves the shrine bewildered by the fact that the Wizard of the Crow can transform itself into male and female characters (274). The *con-fusion* of Kamiti and Nyawira (who is later on referred to as the Limping Witch when she penetrates the presidential palace to free Kamiti who has been arrested by presidential guards) represents the multifaceted nature of Ngugi's characters and the *theatricality* of Ngugi's prose. The spectacles of simulacra around characters, sustaining the anxiety of the reader through suspense, relating the main plot to finicky subplots in this gigantic text and finally unclothing the multiple folds of personality masks constitute major aspects of Ngugi's dexterity in storytelling.

Kamiti and Nyawira are the two sides of the same coin and the plot of the texts is advanced by their mutual complicity against the power elite. Though Nyawira's full name is Grace Nyawira, she tells Kamiti that "I prefer Nyawira by itself." (63). 'Grace' is considered as a remnant of colonialism and only her father calls her by that name. Unlike Karega in *Petals of Blood*, Nyawira lacks the proletarian background of Ngugi's typical Marxist characters for she hails from a relatively well-to-do family that had collaborated with the colonialists prior to independence. Her mercantilist father wishes to betroth

her to an aristocrat, but Nyawira is independent-minded and refuses to be lured by a life of comfort and complacency. When she gets married to the artist Kanuiru, her father is disappointed and thereby disavows her. She decides unregrettably to live with Kanuiru in a union of hard work and dedication. However, she misjudges Kanuiru whose intention is to use her as a pawn to access her father's immense wealth. When she discovers Kanuiru's cloven hoof, she divorces him, dedicating her life to the struggle for democratic freedom in Aburiria. Detached from her family, she anchors herself in the collective struggles of her society: "Involvement in other people's suffering turned out to be the best way of coping with her personal woes, for she was able to see that these woes were not peculiar to her situation but were shared by many others" (428). Nyawira therefore posits as the moral voice in the text and the counterpoise of the boss of the Marching to Heaven Project, Tajirika (who becomes president at the end of the narrative). The latter, whose name literally means "he who becomes rich", represents the ruling class, its intrigues, subterfuges, corruption and neo-colonial inclinations.

Ngugi's system of naming seeks to construct from multiple subjectivities and subjectifications, a communal "we" that participates in a history of struggle against neo-colonialism and dictatorship. However, Ngugi's 'we' is not based on the atomic fixation of identity and anchorage in a specific temporality. On the contrary, it posits itself as a cosmopolitan and not a parochial 'we', one that is based more on civic than ethnic identity. This could account for the shift of the text's setting from the Kamiti

clan to 'Eldares' the capital of Aburiria, 'Eldares,' where most of the episodes in the text take place could represent a literary transfiguration of the cosmopolitan Kenyan town of 'Eldoret.' As such, Ngugi's 'we' is also a civic and culturally complex one whose diversity is 'mobilized' for a united struggle against oppression. It symbolizes the transformation of a folk, nationalist *gemeinschaft* (community) into the civic and patriotic *gesellschaft* (society) that is under construction.

Through the cosmopolitan nature of 'Eldares,' the text adopts affiliative as opposed to filiative approach to collective consciousness. According to Edward Said, filiation stresses a common genealogy while affiliation is based on civic interests and the desire to construct a more representative polity (19-20). It is through affiliation that the Movement for the Voice of the People subverts and deconstructs the parochial governing clique with their restricted cronyism and limited notion of citizenship.

The members of the ruling class are named following a system of nomenclature that exposes the decadent practices of postcolonial power. It is from this perspective that we talk about the Rabelaisian influence on the system of naming in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's text with its use of humour, magical realism and baroque hyperbolisations. The key ministers of the Ruler's regime indulge in plastic surgery to prove their loyalty to the Ruler. Markus Yawe Macho Kali, the minister of foreign affairs increases his eyeballs "so that he can be able to spot the enemies of the Ruler no matter how far in their hiding places [...] enlarged to the size of electric bulbs, his eyes were now the most prominent feature of his face, dwarfing his nose,

cheeks, and forehead...And so Machokali he became, and later on forgot the name given at his birth” (*Wizard* 13).

The new name sets into being a new person, acting out the rules of his self-attributed identity. The habit of plastic surgery is copied by Sikiokku (Minister in charge of State Security) and Big Ben Jumbo (Minister in charge of (mis)information) who enlarge their ears and tongue respectively to rival Machokali in ‘serving’ the Ruler. However, the character Machokali is the most pertinent in Ngugi’s parody on (re)naming. In as much as Machokali enters the fiction of his new personality, he also serves as the ‘spin doctor’ of the regime in creating realities through his oratorical skills.

In the world of the Republic of Aburiria, public performances and rituals come into concrete reality through the system of naming. When the women, through their dance, expose their butts to the presidential tribune as a ritual of desecration and defiance during the visit of the Global Bank delegates, Machokali still finds the appropriate words and the discursive power to transform the scatological performance into a gesture of endorsement and ratification of the Ruler’s regime:

He tried to be glib, reminding the people that they were after all in black Africa, and what they had seen and heard was black humour from an ancient Aburirian ritual. But before elaborating on the ritual and its significance, he glanced at all his guests to see how they were taking his attempt at humour only to see them all staring at something. (252)

What the women enact through their bodies, the state attempts to transform and re-signify through the discursive power of the word. It is when, through the surrealist mood, the guests see the stage crumbling that they can factor the reality of the subversive gesture. In the same way, Machokali and his colleagues in the government use various discourses to define the queue mania depending on the interests of the Ruler. Though the power of re-naming succeeds temporarily, the corrupt government does not succeed in obtaining funding for the white elephant project. The women's exposed butts deconstruct the political world with its moral decadence and very little regard for the citizens' aspirations.

Parodying Transformations

The stylistics of Ngugi's naming in *Wizard of the Crow* combines cultural ethics with burlesque nomenclature, depending on the character's role in the text's thematic while the integration of Rabelaisian aesthetics in Ngugi's nomenclature represents his critical perception of historical transformation. In the same way that Labou Tansi's (anti)hero suffers from the speech malady of *palilalia* in *L'Etat Honteux (The Shameful State)*, the power hungry characters in *Wizard of the Crow* are all stuck by the unexpressed racial wishes of becoming white men. As seen earlier in the case of Tajirika, they suffer from the "if" malady and have to be 'cured' by the Wizard of the Crow who induces them release the magic word, their ultimate wish. This humorous parody is reminiscent of Bakhtin's narration of

a stuttering incidence in Schneegans' *commerdia dell'arte*:

A stutterer talking with Harlequin cannot pronounce a difficult word; he makes a great effort, loses his breath, keeping the word down his throat, sweats and gapes, trembles, chokes. His face is swollen, his eyes pop; "Finally Harlequin, weary of waiting, relieves the stutterer by surprise; he rushes ahead and forward, and hits the man in the abdomen. The difficult word is born at last. (304)

Re-echoed in several passages in *Wizard of the Crow* in which Kamiti attempts to cure each and every member of the political leadership, this humorous aesthetics provides a clue to the understanding of the name of the absurd Republic of A-b-u-r-i-r-i-a. As we noted above, a name in Ngugi's fiction is not a mere noun, it is an event, a process and a narrative. It is through the analogy of stuttering and the complex historical *narrative* it distends that we analyze the name: A-B-U-R-I-R-I-A. The setting of Ngugi's baroque text cannot be pinned down to any specific geographical locality. We are only told that 'Aburiria'⁴ is found somewhere in the continent of Africa. As a form of geographical designation, it is evanescent and indeterminate. However, on the basis of its morphology, it could be considered a narrative summary of the plot and a critique of political transformation. 'A-b-u-r-i-r-i-a' suggests a process of revolution, a major event B (a plosive sound which phonetically marks a change) that moves history from its primordial condition A, raising immense hope and euphoria, captured by the high

vowel sound [u]. This plosive event that signals progression unfortunately dithers on a form of con-fusion given that the *euphoria* is followed by a series of repetitive and degenerative glides [r] and the low *disphoric* vowel [i]. Given the recurrence of the glides [r-r-] and the corresponding low vowel [i-i-], could we talk of an insinuation of Mbembe's view of the stuttering movement of African history? Is the relationship between the two occurrences A - B to be represented as continuity instead of the great break that it purports? However, the specter of the initial and near deterministic [A] which reappears as the ultimate point (this time in small letter) threatens the movement with reversion or regression. It is at this interval that the process of trans-formation can be said to conceal a regressive element.

The above analysis symbolizes the influence of historical determinism on *Wizard of the Crow* and the tendency of the Ruler's so-called progress to signify regression into new forms of slavery/colonialism. Could the name of Ngugi's fictional Republic (with its inherent synecdoche of reference) therefore be a critique against the re-colonization of Africa? We would push this formalistic analysis further by using Hayden White's model for the representation of historical events in historical/literary narratives. As quoted in Leitch, White shows how history and literature both plot series of events (a b c d e...n.) in a variety of schemata:

-A⁵ b c d e ...n/ a B c d e ...n/ a b C d e...n/ a b c D e...n/ a b c d E...n (1546)

White argues that it is in the plotting of history along such schemata that various forms of determinisms and ideologies are observed ranging from the totemic A in Freud, Marx, and Rousseau to the romantic E of Augustinian's millenarian *City of God* and Hegelian Idealism in the *Philosophy of History*. (1547). If we plot Ngugi's Republic of A-b-u-r-i-r-i-a and the historiography of its fictional world, we would arrive at the first structure above: with the seminal /A/ and the movement towards the /a/. Assuming that the ultimate /a/ in "Aburiria" would represent the /e/ in this schema would lead us to the risk of reductive (mis)reading of the text. It is for this reason that the /a/ could be problematized to *also* denote the possibility of a new beginning, the openness of the future to a variety of unpredictable possibilities. But the miniscule nature of the /a/ entails that the new future would not come in a Big Bang but through progressive work, individual and communal consciousness. It is the controversy of this /a/ and the uncertain nature of the beginning it heralds that situates Ngugi's fable within the ambits of the modern novel with its symbolic indeterminacy and ambiguous ending, epitomized on the one hand by Tajirika's seizure of power and the growing consciousness of Eldoret by the Movement for the voice of the people, on the other. *Wizard of the Crow* is therefore caught in between Augustinian Romantic determinism and Beckettian representation of Fallen Man. The novel therefore ends in a polyphonic mode with elements of the resurgence of civic consciousness amidst the perpetuation of dictatorship by Tajirika.

The representation of this 'problematic echo of transformation' engages our analysis of (re-) naming in

the public sphere. Though the end of the Cold war signals the advent of democracy and the advent of multiparty politics, the leadership in Wizard turn these ideals into a sham. The democracy to which the Ruler ‘gives birth’ at the end of the narrative is a smoke screen. Power circulates in the hands of successive members of the ruling class. In a pompous inauguration of the putatively ‘new era’ which he claims to have initiated, the Ruler remains synonymous to the State:

He would be the normal head of all political parties. This meant that in the next general elections, all parties would, of course, be choosing him as their candidate for the presidency: His victory would be a victory for all the parties, and more important for Aburirians, a victory for the wise and tested leadership[...] Direct Democracy. Open Democracy. Baby D is born. (699)

The democratic transition is guided by the self-interests of the Ruler. The ‘Ruler’s party’ is merely transformed into the ‘Ruling party,’ auguring no substantial change for the country and its process of democratization. In fact, those who form the opposition are former members of the stagnant political system who later return to the political scene as simulated opposition. One such example is Sikiokku, the former Security Secretary and close aid of the Ruler, who creates an “opposition party”, the “Loyal Democratic Party” as he pledges loyalty to the Ruler.

Ngugi’s text inertly questions the concept of transformation as progress from oppression to freedom, from war to peace in the representation of the historical

moments/movements of the 1990s. To examine temporality in *Wizard of the Crow* from the Cold War perspective is to perceive the “wind of change” with even more rigorous skepticism than the preceding wave of independence. Ngugi recaptures the complexities of African political field in the late eighties and early nineties. Even though certain civic rights are achieved, the eventful 1990 marks the beginning of an open-ended moment where new positions of power/subalternity are re-negotiated and former dictatorships devise new ways of survival. The gains of multiparty, civil society are threatened by new forms of hegemonic control: ‘corporonialism’ (747), the extraversion of governance by transnational and multinational co-operations. When Nyawira tells Kamiti that her boss, Tajirika has a very important “reception dinner in honour of the mission from the GB”, Kamiti seems confused: “GB? Great Britain?” Kamiti asked, a little puzzled. What was she talking about and what did it have to do with her setting up an appointment? “Not Great Britain! Global Bank!” (51).

The emphatic “No” and the confusion in the acronym ‘GB’ is both satirical and ironic. When considered within Ngugi’s anti-imperialist tradition this affirmative “No” is an epathonorsis (a ‘calculated error’) that conflates both ‘Great Britain’ and ‘Global Bank.’ It summarizes the history of global capitalism from the era of British imperial mercantilism to modern neo-liberalism. In other words, ‘GB’ underlines the palimpsest of the present moment of trans-formation. Partly due to internal protests and the pressure of Ambassador Gabriel Gemstone,⁶ the Ruler is forced to ‘democratize.’ With the end of the Cold War, he will no more use the trump card of the “war

against communism” as a pretext to hunt down his detractors whom he indexes as ‘Communists’ and ‘Anarchists.’

Despite his satirical portrayal of the moralist connotation of ‘civil society’ and ‘international community,’ Ngugi represents the post-1990 public sphere not as a stage of unilateral/ monopolistic discourse but as one in which hegemonic naming and meaning formation are negotiated and contested by a growing civil society. The names attached to particular social and national events define the interpellation of subject in the public and private spheres, soliciting participation, complacency and collaboration. The public sphere in Ngugi’s text becomes a venue for the contestation of State ‘ordained’ symbols and meanings. In consonance with our prior analogy of the State’s appropriation of the word/ culture/ world, Achille Mbembe posits that the post-colonial State:

Claims to hold the truth with regard to Africa and its history, to codify it, to demarcate, unify and divide space. The Theologian State is one which does not only arrogate the distribution of power and influence, social relations, economic arrangements and political processes. It also constitutes itself into the instituting principle behind the language and myths of a given society) (*my translation*) (Mbembe 128).⁷

In Ngugi’s imaginary world, the constituted subject does not obsequiously ingest the State’s design of meaning formation, but attempts to subvert, re-signify and rename it. When the Ruler celebrates the ‘Birth of Baby Democracy,’ the official connotation is overturned by the Movement for the Voice of the people. The movement

calls it: Day of National Renewal (669), underlining the capacity of the people to reclaim their culture of unity in the struggle for representation. It brings out the fact that the postcolonial public sphere is a space of negotiation and contention of national symbols, metaphors and frames of meaning construction. The two forms of metaphors are thereby confronted in the public sphere. In the same way as Guy Debord's analogy of the 'armed faith'(137) of 'colonial missionaries', State discourse also operates in the form of 'armed metaphors' since the State often resorts to State ideological and repressive apparatuses for its *en-forcement*. However, with the moment of change, the Ruler's control over the army becomes uncertain. In this dimension, the progressive outlook of Ngugi's text can be highlighted. When the State orders the military to fire at the protesters, a boomerang effect is created "The two main pillars on which his rule depended, the armed forces and the West, had loosened considerably" (645).

Ngugi's representation of the political and economic present of post-colonialism entails explicit narrative choices in his depiction of the capitalist project of the State and the neoliberal system. When Ngugi's narrative encounters intricate analysis of economy, the nature of expression and the logic of analysis spill out of the hand of the metadiegetic narrator and gives way to what could be the implied author's voice. This is evident towards the end of the text, when the narrator defines the logic of modern neo-liberalism as it affects the citizens of the Republic of Aburiria. The new capitalist system is indicted as 'corporonialism', underlying the pervasive influence of transnational corporations on the neo-colony: "We would volunteer Aburiria to become the first to be

wholly managed by private capital, to become the first voluntary corporate colony, a corporony, the first in the new global order” (746-747). The preoccupation with economy and the parody of the capitalist status of the Aburirian economy reveal the multivocality and polyphony of Ngugi’s text.

The main narrator, Arigaigai Gatherer, the half-educated police, near aphasiac constable at the origin of the whole saga of the Wizard of the Crow, more often engages in economic analyses that slow down the tempo of the narrative and creates a form of dissonance with the overall burlesque tonality of the text. In *Wizard of the Crow*, there is therefore a struggle between the traditional storytelling model which is at the basis of the *Gicaandi* narrator and the overarching political intentionality of the author. In the same manner as Ngugi’s hero, Ngugi’s narrator is a loaded narrator, overburdened with historical memory of imperialism and most importantly, the memory of Ngugi’s earlier works. The voice of the author therefore competes with that of the narrator with the former’s tendency to analyze processes, direct readership, indulge into invectives and to qualify and evaluate what is narrated through a system of judgmental adjectivisation. This is brought out in the following passage: “When the farmer and the manufacturer grow and make things within, the neo-imperial class imports en masse the cheapest from abroad and undermine the efforts within. We live in a corporate globe under imperial corporonialism, as proudly claimed by the new ogres” (760).

In conclusion, it can be said that one of the major conflicts in Ngugi's text circulates around the question of naming. The system of naming in *Wizard of the Crow* characterizes the question of self-awareness, friction between State and society, the tensions within movements of change and more importantly, the various tendencies, temperaments and tonalities within Ngugi's authorial consciousness. Across the breadth of Ngugi's literary career, naming has often been a major paradigm of representation and a gateway into his metaphorical system. Names do not denote the solitary individual in their existential present-moment but relates them to society and history. The name entrusts characters with a mission, and accords them place and function in the community. The name of a character, just like that of a setting is often a carrier of a historical memory and a cultural identity. It is the name that brings the character into being and re-defines their relationship with the outside world, enhancing their self-realization and their reconciliation with the community in a spirit of collective agency and the crystallization of a communal spirit in the quest for social change.

Chapter 3

Coetzee Enigma

Solanki, S

Datta. Dayadhvam. Damyata.
Eliot: *The Waste Land*

I

IN his essay, “Into the Dark Chamber: the Writer and the South African State,” in *Doubling the Point*,¹ J. M. Coetzee meditates the meaning and effect of torture in particular and brutality in general within South Africa’s dystopian reality. Here he interprets an episode of flogging in Nadine Gordimer’s *Burger’s Daughter* as one “com[ing] from the inner reaches of Dante’s hell, beyond the scope of morality” (367). One cannot question his take on it: South Africa “belong[ed] to a damned, dehumanized world,” comparable to the ‘the dark chamber’ of torture and inhuman brutality; “a world of blind force and mute suffering, debased, beneath good and evil” (367) where the physical existence of a torture chamber would be an inane absurdity, a grotesque parody, only emphasizing the reality of fallen scales -where

‘good’ and ‘evil’ have lost their meaning in an abyss of life/ living.

It tells a lot about Coetzee’s epithets of the life in South Africa in the context: going “beyond” good and evil; therefore despairing of the contemporary structures of perception and understanding. It could well be set in the words of one of Coetzee’s characters as, “[n]ot human evil, just a vast circulatory system, to whose workings pity and terror are irrelevant” (*Disgrace* 98). In a contrastive significance, and to render it in a better perspective, let us recall Lurie’s innocent homily to his daughter, Lucy, regarding the animals: “if we are going to be kind, let it be out of simple generosity, not because we feel guilty or fear of retribution” (74). This is a piece of elderly advice by a father to his passionately committed daughter and uttered just before the brutal violence strikes them. Lucy is gang-raped, Lurie badly burnt and the car stolen. The flagrant violence takes them both by surprise but, unlike Lucy, Lurie appears excessively appalled and horrified and, like a true European, harbours civic desires of justice. As it is, this intellectual father is reduced to a pathetically uninformed citizen vis-à-vis his hardy and hard-headed daughter who better knows the legacy of “apartheid South Africa as both a product and a symptom of the West’s continued dependence on an economy that is colonial in its inextricably linked ideological and financial interests” (Jolly 368)². It is here that the roots of the enigmatic nature of *Disgrace* can be located.

Wrapped in the guiding consciousness of an individualist scholar -Lurie- the reader cruises along, grappling with the easy ambivalence of masculine desire and its facilitating wit against the backdrop of a country

weary from a scorching past. Even the rape of Lucy and the ensuing violence seems to fit into the thematic and, with the nuanced characterization of Lurie, the plot goes along pretty well, self-contained and evoking wonderment at Coetzee's resourcefulness. But then follows Lucy's formidable decision: not to quit, or retaliate, or even abort the child, but to accept 'a dog's life.' Hell breaks loose, including the traditional fortifications of canonical ideas! What needful actions that the white South African writers were required to do is unambiguously pointed out by Coetzee: "while white South African writers have successfully subverted the colonial view of things, they have not taken the step of imagining a possible 'moral community' in their native country" (*Doubling* 339).

Apartheid years and what entailed them are beyond description or known modes of being, therefore reaction to these years -in moral, ethical, or civic terms- irredeemably engenders a plethora of uncomfortable positions in all circles. Conjunctive to this, Coetzee's singularly enigmatic relationship with the country -marginalized yet symbiotic, implicating yet wrenching- further compounds his private and public response to it.³ His is also the advantage of marginalization or the vantage point of the periphery lending him a more disinterested view from a position of in-betweenness - neither African nor white- where he can both avoid the abhorred rhetoric of politics and pursue his maverick form to explore the stygian apartheid and post-apartheid reality. However, it ensures no easy escape to him from a country and times that sheltered his boyhood and youth because of the inherent impressionability of adolescence. They

inhabit and render the novelist's narratives and whatever he would 'tale' in his mature years.

When Lurie pathetically moans with his arms outstretched to embrace and soothe his violated daughter after the attack, she would not join the show but stoically asks him to stick to his side of the story. It takes some time and her firm advice for him to understand the new situation and the stakes. No wonder, then, that Mrs. Curren in *Age of Iron* writes: "How long, how long before the softer ages return in their cycle, the age of clay, the age of earth" (50) in a letter she means to reach her daughter after her death, if at all. This reflects Coetzee's own preoccupation behind the persona of Mrs. Curren obtaining for himself the dubious authority of observer though involved. As it is, the personal has long been erased from the historical enterprise in Africa. If the present is to be responded to in a saner way so that a future may ensue in a different hue, not only the past is *not* to be forgotten but the present has to be lived responsibly -with love: not the type that was professed in the past but a more courageous and ethical one even if it means pain and suffering.

In one of his interviews with David Atwell Coetzee says, "in South Africa it is not possible to deny the authority of suffering and therefore of the body."⁴ What emanated from the reformation and humanism was too egotistical to be comprehensively sympathetic to the Other and, in due course, outrageously flared out as anti-Semitism and imperialism. In his last of the trilogy of fictionalized memoirs, *Summertime*, he records his father's response to his outrage sparked by *Sunday Times* report on Francistown massacre: "He [his father] resolves

the problem by immersing himself in the cricket scores. As a response to a moral dilemma it is feeble; yet is his own response -fits of rage and despair- any better?" (5).

Fortuitously, Coetzee's *Age of Iron* is in dialogue with the concerns of *Disgrace*; therefore, there is continuity in the two works regarding the futurity and the question of the role of whites in it. This enigmatic novel cannot be fathomed unless we come to terms with the central characters of *Disgrace* -Lurie and his daughter, Lucy. In our reading of the novel, Lurie can only be understood by way of Lucy; therefore, a word in *Age of Iron* about Mrs Curren's enigmatic epistle to her daughter who has settled in America with her husband will be in order. This novel subtly manoeuvred and given the form of an epistle opens with Mrs Curren receiving the news of her fatal disease. Her daughter having married an American chose to discard the 'cursed' place for good, but she chose to stay back, not having gathered requisite courage to betray their roots. As the new knowledge breaks upon her, she comes across the resolutely silent and beggarly tramp, Vercueil, in whom she unexpectedly finds succour and self-definition. As the narrative unfolds, she discovers in him an indispensable ally and comic-ironic philosopher guide. Soon enough, she senses the stifled rivulet of love that she had considered long dried. As if Vercueil was the key to the meaning of her life, what seemed to her an impulsive and instinctual decision turns out to be the most important event that makes possible in her later life (that is, the narrative present) the consolation of fidelity, hence grace -that of having lived ethically, faithfully, and responsibly. She divulges this awareness, its gradual realization, to her daughter in her letter that constitutes the novel. This

epistle of hers is meant to be posted by her consort, Vercueil, after her death.

Explaining the purpose of this device in the novel, Derek Attridge strikes the heart of the matter in these words:

Mrs. Curren is right to trust Vercueil; for doing so is itself a crucial part of the understanding that she is bequeathing in the act that comprises this letter...she [her daughter] will experience (and not merely learn as a lesson) what trust is, the kind of trust that the future of the South Africa she left behind, in what might be regarded as a failure of trust, desperately needs. If she doesn't get the letter, of course, her mother's trust and the understanding that it implies will have been discredited, removing the very reason for reading it. (99)

Coetzee's understanding of the South African situation as regards the Europeans is underpinned by a sense of a complicit politics, which is predominantly at variance with the rest. Lucy's and Mrs. Curren's awareness of a disgraceful and degenerate super-existence as racially privileged corroborates the guilt of the past and "carries its own censure of apartheid society where both biological and cultural hybridity were artificially policed and prevented." (Head x)

II

David Lurie, a middle-aged, twice divorced, jaded professor of Communications at the Cape Technical University, though a self-confessed womanizer "exist[ing]

in an anxious flurry of promiscuity” (7) in his smug and haughty masculinity, is sexually repressed and emotionally starved. Despite his illusion of having “solved the problem of sex rather well” (1), affection keeps growing up in him, tipping him precariously over the edge. In a reckless fit he lays hands on a student, Milanie Isaacs, despite her obvious unwillingness, thereby plunging himself in a very demeaning situation before the inquiry committee. Being what he is, Lurie neither gives in nor defends. He goes through the motions of inquiry with brazen disinterestedness as if it has not merely to do with himself but is, more fittingly, about the whole humanity, even the whole creatural world, and he stands alone for the metaphysical question of the “rights of desire” (89) and the “ecstasies of the unlovely” (44). Thus when the committee asks him if he has any objections to the committee, he says: “I have reservations of a philosophical kind, but I suppose they are out of bounds” (47). One of the members calls it a “subtle mockery” (50) and even thinks “we may have a duty to protect [him] from [him]self” (49).

His disgust at the inquiry committee provokes his exit from the academia only to run into petulant forces of violence and racism which is strongly redolent of imperial structures. Both sides of the divide of racist ideology are homogenized in the mirror image of retrogressive hatred: the supercilious comfort of one and the abysmal racial hatred of the other. As he arrives at Lucy’s, he is too burdened with the other side of the world to appreciate Lucy’s longing for a meaningful acceptance and assimilation into the local soil unlike most of the white

who are either too afraid or too racist to connect to the land their fathers and fore-fathers inhabited so long.

Lurie is largely a stranger to the contemporary South Africa which has been the dark torture chamber for too long a while to be conducive to outside probity, however sane. To bring to bear upon it exterior ethical notions is not only ironic but even laughable. His situation is akin to Mrs. Curren's who is horrified to see children being hardened into weapons of war and pushed into conflicts with the authorities oblivious of the consequences. Hence in order to underline the discrepancy, by way of juxtaposition, *Disgrace* invites 'counterfocalisation' through Lucy (Attwell 168). It is also to intercede, and thereby supersede, the obsolete world of vain, totalizing morality, unprecedented by a meaningful inquiry into the situation as historically obtained.

In the case of Melanie, Lurie cannot accept the fact of her victimization through his sexually predatory instinct and hides behind the human nature which supposedly blurs the limits of the freedom of self. No amount of reason and argument could convince him of his unethical exploitation of an immature pupil at least till half the narrative. This trajectory of Lurie's self-seeking individualism conflates with Lucy's determined and stoical acceptance of her new relation vis-à-vis Petrus after the brutal gang-rape. Her obstinate and firm refusal to pursue illusions of justice in post-apartheid South Africa amid the hectic dismantling of settler-colonialist establishment is incomprehensible to Lurie who is a mere visitor at Lucy's farm and lacks a profounder understanding of Lucy's situation. It paints Lurie in a lonely corner with his outdated and anachronistic civic

notions characterizing the imperial establishments of yore and their unrelenting dominance and insistence to redress the grievances of the white to their taste and liking. His lurid sexual abuse of Melaine and vociferous outrage in a way connects him and makes him an unwitting successor to this bleak historical enterprise and, as such, an intruder into the world that Lucy has accepted and made her own.

Even greater question is why Lurie, willingly or unwillingly, slinks into an animal-like condition. Even if his self-respect would not let him go back to the academia, what basic reasons/ experiences become powerful enough to encourage him to become a dog-man? Perhaps it is the case of the dog “hat[ing] its own nature” (90) and relates to his metaphysical anguish concerning the creatural desires which are treated like appendicitis in sanitized modern societies and which, paradoxically, function puritanically, “want[ing] a spectacle: breast-beating, remorse, tears” (66) for the so-called transgressions of society’s codes of conduct. What Lurie disgustedly reacts against before the Inquiry Committee is the show, the public performance of a very private searing of the self; the reductive public knowledge of something painfully intimate. By discarding the institutionalized form of confession and performance of it (rather than the true substance) and accepting excoriating punishment itself, in place of conceding the easeful way out through the performance, “living it out from day to day” and “trying to accept disgrace as my state of being,” (172) he therefore embraces the punitive self-exile in the absence of a trustworthy authority of penance or a confessant. Although what the father and daughter do “sounds like someone trying to make reparation for past misdeeds”

(77), it is more a question of the future than the past, of the individual self than the race. Bluntly as he puts it, “I would prefer simply to be put against a wall and shot. Have done with it” (66). Such is his refusal to conform to the dubious morals of the society. If “[t]he disgrace into which Lurie feels himself to be sunk cannot be equated with the public disgrace” (Attridge 179), what remains is the introversion of it, a very private, self-aware and spiritualized abhorrence of unbridled human hunger and transgression of one’s “rights of desire” (89) into others’ rights of being.

His existence as an academic is more or less marginal, at least, as far as thematic concerns of the novel go. An unrestrained streak in his own nature tangles with his professional ethics and, worse than that, with his self-possessed emotive individuality. With so remarkably undistinguished existence and burdened with equally prosaic academic projects, he lands at the doorstep of his daughter, who is living a staid, Spartan and hardy, but more meaningful, life. He is neither attracted to nor wanted in his previous existence. What takes place at Lucy’s further reduces his previous existence to irrelevance, if not plain viciousness. Therefore like Lucy, he too gives himself to the upturning prongs of history. This is not to suggest his passive hopelessness in the aftermath of Lucy’s rape. Actually the rape is the gyre which throws them off the keel into a unidirectional spin, making them same despite all their difference. From this point, Lurie’s life goes Lucy’s way, however unintentionally, and he finds as a dog-man what Lucy seeks in pregnancy. Both give themselves up -to South Africa, to life. Not in generosity; certainly not in charity,

because it is “[h]arder to give alms to the bitter-hearted...rain falling on barren soil” (131).

Lurie reminds us of Mrs. Curren who for long disliked the South African children but, ultimately, her pain for the country overwhelms her, becomes too deep seated and reaches her very being, presumably in form of cancer, and gushes forth in a fountain of spirituality craving an indefinable form of grace orientated by a need to ‘save her soul.’ Interestingly, a parallel can be traced into Coetzee’s own life by way of his fictionalized memoir, *Youth*, in which he, as a child, longs to escape the conflict-riven South Africa to London to become an artist. The horrendous violence in the aftermath of the protests against the pass laws appears to him threatening to his artistic prospects. What made it worse was government’s anxiety to play down and “make [...] it less than what it was” (39). However, ironically, at least as an artist, what saves him is the same South Africa he considered a millstone around his neck. In retrospect, therefore, it is difficult to imagine him as a novelist without his African debt.

Lucy and Lurie are infused with vastly different but related ethical perspectives. Whereas Lucy’s “transcendence of a relationship with someone, with an other: love, friendship, sympathy” (Levinas 194) radically defines her as “the one chosen” (88) and uplifts her humanity, Lurie’s existence is the problematization of human desires, their ontological inscription, and their ethical figuration in our social history. He ultimately despairs of paltry human endeavours to such ethical unravelling despite his acceptance of the presence of a soul in human body and, therefore, he feels the creatural

world as abandoned. Moreover, despite his individualistic egotism, seemingly of “in-itself and for-itself” (Levinas 174), his acceptance of being a dog-man acknowledges the inscrutability of life itself.

Interestingly Lurie is on the same footing as the author -probably his most autobiographical fictional extension. *Disgrace* is published in 1999, which is in Coetzee’s fifty-ninth year, and Lurie is shown to be fifty two. Adjusting for the time he took in completing and getting it published, this difference is more or less erased. Besides the near coincidence of age, there is a greater coincidence of intellectual resourcefulness between them: the consciousness and the flux of thought are remarkably overlapping. For instance, Lurie frequently hesitates over striking words and phrases and handles them fondly with ironic interest quite like the author. Then the nagging question of the role of art and its power and usefulness in a terrain fraught with the aftermath of apartheid bruises is too painfully close to the author to have been mere incidental appendage in Lurie’s characterization. Moreover, if one is willing to believe his fictionalized memoirs, even the sexual exploitation of Melanie can be traced back to the author, however feebly.

Then there is the author’s concern with animal rights which later come to fore in his *Elizabeth Costello*. This ethical dimension of his personality which reflects in his own vegetarianism resonates in Lurie’s quiet meditations about dogs in *Disgrace*, though here it is weighted in with, and qualified by, the thematic projections into the ironic human predicament of man’s abandoned state on this planet where, despite the sham of his preferred status and liberal self-enhanced existence, there is little to hope.

Therefore Lurie, when attacked by avenging racists, muses: “He speaks Italian, he speaks French, but Italian and French will not save him here in darkest Africa. He is helpless, an Aunt Sally, a figure from a cartoon, a missionary topi waiting with clasped hands and upcast eyes while the savages jaw away in their own lingo preparatory to plunging him into their boiling cauldron” (95).

It is not only the economy of war that defines the startling fate of communities but that of the shorter cycles or phases of history of man and their superficial and haughty ideological structures of advancement at the cost of the rest: “Too many people, too few things. What there is must go into circulation, so that everyone can have a chance to be happy for a day” (98).

III

Unlike Lurie’s reaction to the violence, Lucy’s reaction to it is in a new language which is her own, devoid of the weight of western rationality and quasi-judicious legality to match the complex racial-colonial and socio-political motivations behind the gory act. Her choice of giving birth to the child of stigma is exactly the “tongue of a god” (*Age* 91) that Mrs. Curren alludes to: and this tongue of God speaks the language of the purest love -purest for its very selflessness. On the face of it, what appears much more puzzling and inexplicable, that is, Lucy’s mute and determined acceptance of the violence and, hence, a compromised existence, is paradoxically a more convincing and mature response to not only the tragedy that befell them but also the over-determination of private

lives by public institutions of history. Not that such may be the prescriptive tolerance of racism in the then South Africa: the prescriptive, in Lyotardian terms, becomes as “it does not describe a state of affairs but aims to bring one about” (qtd. in Malpas 53). Although the distinction of Lucy’s act is a fine one, as “all politics implies the prescription of doing something else than what is” (52), Lurie’s outraged sense of justice reflects Lyotard’s second model of justice or the grand narrative of emancipation which makes it no less fundamentalist than the communist one.⁵ As regards Lyotard: “To be just is to allow others to participate in the ‘game of the just,’ to respect their difference and allow them to speak for themselves” (57).

Like Mrs. Curren’s doomed epistle, which has an obvious destination but undependable emissary, Lucy’s symbolic sacrifice has an end in view -that of a vestige of love, an iota of it, though buried deep under rather obtrusive and conflictive dialectic; the means to evoke it, appeal to it, is conspicuously absent or at least unknown and even dangerous, and may from the present positioning appear tantamount to madness and insane behaviour. But axiomatically, extreme malady requires extreme remedy, therefore “to be a good person is not enough!” (*Age* 165)

Considering her reaction to the violence a mere strategic resignation in order to survive and stay on cannot explain away her refusal to abort the child; mere paying for the past, of bearing the sins of her father certainly cannot explain suffering the rapists’ child. Although she makes private accommodations, the legacy of horror makes it a wholly public affair. Nor is it what Elleke Boehmer argues citing the authority of the text as

“surrender without significant change to traditional forms of subjection” (145).⁶ It is a sacrifice for an ‘unborn’ love that, at that specific moment, requires her body, aptly analogous to the narrative of the sacrifice of Christ’s body. Similarly, her description of Lucy as an instance of “internaliz[ation] of pitifulness” and becoming a scapegoat runs into an impasse too: it evades the issue of her volition which makes it all the more difficult to accept especially given Lucy’s characterization as self-willed and hardy. Consequently, though she becomes “*the* human body-in-pain of the text,” she is not a “nonintrospective arbiter of what it is to live the truth of the new South Africa,” and definitely not “unwillingly and unwittingly, an apologia” (145). Her act of suffering is not a form of resistance offered against the violation of the self or the legacy of hatred deeply embedded into the racist projections on one side and aggressions on the other. It goes beyond: to re-figuration and conciliation; assimilation and mutation. However muted, this response of Lucy’s is an overarching bridge to a propitious future, if not outright utopia, and it elevates her -rather than reduces her to a mere object- to prophetic heights. Hers is a symbolic enhancement through her non-affiliation to or endorsement of the Enlightenment-generated liberal democratic ethics of life and behaviour tested to their limits in post-apartheid South Africa. Therefore, Lucy is like Michael K in certain respects in that she inhabits the very system that is ontologically erosive; only she projects herself -almost *transcendentally*- well beyond, which is not the case with Michael K.

Lucy’s anxiety is about the absence of a mediator, not so much to carry a message as to bear the symbol and

seeds of love across the racial divide. Bearing this message of hope, she is ready to suffer the emissary role of Vercueil and even go beyond it like a prophet: she completes the task of Vercueil and, unlike him (if one is incredulous of his fitness as an emissary), proves a dependable messenger. Therefore, it is in her history that history can redeem itself to an extent.⁷ Her valour is of the messianic need of humanity for which she accepts 'crucifixion' into the pregnancy of hate. Coetzee, surely, doesn't propose it as political or ethical solution as such (which will be an absurd reading). But it supersedes both the political and the ethical and enters the realm of the spiritual, or of faith, "a postreligious faith or a faith for a postreligious age," which "looks back toward what it denies and forward toward what it makes possible" (Ricoeur 436). As he puts in one of his interviews: "I understand the Crucifixion as a refusal and an introversion of retributive violence" (*Doubling* 337). Lucy's act, too, is a formidable internalization of racial violence, thus preempting the validation of violence. Reading the novel this way seems not inappropriate or excessive; in Coetzee's words: "if all of us imagined violence as violence against ourselves, perhaps we would have peace" (337). Decolonization for Africa was rather a self-sufficient process. It entailed self-mobilization and calling forth its own people but, as regards true freedom, it was merely a rudimentary beginning: it cannot be possible in the absence of "an ethical community" in its collectivity, and "heralds" (340) in its individuality.⁸ In the same interview Coetzee marks Vercueil as the herald of death but, surely, his view carries the focalization - hence pessimism- of Mrs. Curren and is therefore

provisionally insufficient. In view of the whole oeuvre, Vercueil as a potential messenger of Mrs. Curren's epistle is also a herald of truth and faith and, as such, like Lucy, an embodiment of such prophetic message of love beyond the body and the self. Thus both of them are harbingers of true freedom which, according to Coetzee, is "another name for the unimaginable" (341).

In the end Lucy becomes the appropriate selection (or Coetzee's later strategic re-figuration) for Mrs. Curren's message of 'love' for the land and its impoverished and dirty children whom Mrs. Curren was unable to love for the most part of her life. Interestingly, what is remarkable here is Coetzee's choice of Lucy (Lurie is Wordsworth scholar and Lucy his Nature Child), a woman of practical affairs over Lurie, the intellectual and male who, despite all the milk of kindness lapping within him, tries to justify his raptorial appetite for the young flesh. In Wordsworth's poems, Lucy is propounded as the child of nature, that is, without human parentage which, in religious terms, implies taintless or without sin. Her circumventing the human descent implies her superiority to, at least, the average humanity and evokes a transcendental dimension inherent to the very human nature. The symbolism of her name is unmistakable in that the author wants her to overarch the vicious historical divide etched deep into the self-serving western knowledge. Nothing could be more explicit. It is no coincidence that Coetzee disseminates his most sympathetic and ethical words through the persona of a woman character, Elizabeth Costello.

Although Lucy is much more central than Lurie to the thematic structure of *Disgrace*, Coetzee's investment of Lurie with his guiding consciousness is undeniable for his

centrality/ importance in the dynamics of the narrative structure. Despite Lucy's appalling victimization -one that resonates in and is qualified by Lurie's exploitation of Melanie- she is invariably seen through Lurie's eyes. It is Lurie's disconsolate helplessness and seething anger at the injustice that comes to the forefront, and is felt more directly than Lucy's pent-up chagrin and the storm that rages within her. Most importantly, what one misses is her nerve-wracking struggle in the span between her rape and her declaration to Lurie about her intention not to quit the farm.

The direction of this reading addresses this issue too: Lucy's decision not to accept defeat in face of "such personal hatred" (156) but defeat them irrevocably in Gandhian terms makes her a prophetic figure, of the realm of transcendence, therefore, beyond the realm of discourse. Besides, the grim truth of South African reality does not admit of the calcified sensibilities of a language that is always already a part of the gruesome history of dominance, and has no conduit into the finer nerves of a more meaningful 'white' engagement into a shredded black sensibility. It is "[l]ike a dinosaur expiring and settling in the mud...stiffened" (117) or "tried, friable, eaten from the inside as if by termites" (129). Lurie's perspective is historically entrenched -in the milieu of post-apartheid, post-imperialist individualism- and his voice is not merely that of an aggrieved father of a recalcitrant daughter. Despite the device of third person narrative voice, Coetzee is far into it as one harangued by the critics of his politics (or non-politics) for his European debt. Coetzee's lurking presence behind the persona of Lurie is deeply felt in all his trenchant philosophizing and

precision vocabulary. He is also the one that is more sharply and starkly realized with his human -or rather, masculine- cravings and failings. However, it shifts the burden of primacy of plot element onto Lucy, thus making possible the ethical and spiritual trajectory to be explored in David Lurie's character. This projection of Lurie is in no way pendant or superfluous, as some of the readings of the work imply. Quite contrarily, this side of Lurie's character is essential in keeping with the holistic vision of the work.

Times have changed and, in pointing as much, Attridge is not off the mark. Lurie used to be a professor of modern languages but the 'rationalization' drive leaves him a teacher of communications. Soraya, the prostitute he visits, is a 'professional' who prefers not to mix it with her personal life. One of the rapists 'guides' the youngest among them as if bequeathing a legacy of hate. Lurie, despite his scholarly credentials and pedantic books behind him, is not much of a help in the real world, not even a sound counsel: "[t]eaching was never a vocation for me. Certainly I never aspired to teach people how to live" (162). When horrified at Lucy's decision not to quit he ferrets for words and all he comes up with is "it will strip you of all honor; you will not be able to live with yourself" (162). He could still use the vocabulary of the everyday normality. Without berating him for it, Lucy plainly sees and tells him, "you are not the guide I need, not at this time" (163). The language of his is that of an outsider, a visitor, who could as well have been on a weekend jaunt with his daughter in one of the exotic rural locale, not in any way of a rooted inhabitant. Lucy, therefore, doesn't agree with him -reminding us of Mrs.

Curren. When Lurie chooses written words to communicate instead of dialogue, she writes back:

I am not the person you know. I am a dead person and I do not know yet what will bring me back to life. All I know is that I cannot go away. You do not see this, and I do not know what more I can do to make you see. It is not as if you have chosen deliberately to sit in a corner where the rays of the sun do not shine. I think of you as one of the chimpanzees, the one with his paws over his eyes. (161)

What Lurie cannot understand, apart from the pain of Lucy's stubborn refusal to pursue justice and go for a trial against the possible perpetrators of the crime including Petrus, is the nagging coldness between them. Matters come to a head when she tells him, "(w)hen it comes to men and sex, David, nothing surprises me any more. Maybe, for men, hating the woman makes sex more exciting. You are a man, you ought to know" (158). When the novel opens with this remark for him: "fifty-two, divorced, he has, to his mind, solved the problem of sex rather well" (1), there's hardly a doubt about his fallibility: sex for love, prostitute for wife, wit for sense; neither a good teacher, nor husband, nor father, and of course, not a guide either. This is where we can locate the provenance of Lucy's daunting valour: Africa as the homeland and its inhabitants as her community, which is what Coetzee thinks the country's whites lack or deny: "denial of an acknowledgeable desire to embrace Africa, embrace the body of Africa; and fear of being embraced in return by Africa" (*Doubling* 97). It manifests in the

denial of the local, of the vicinity, and a futile search for the shadowy racial kin and escapee blood relations: “[o]ne must love what is nearest. One must love what is to hand, as a dog loves” (*Age* 190) because “blood is one: a pool of life dispersed among us in separate existences, but belonging by nature together: lent, not given: held in common, in trust, to be preserved: seeming to live in us, but only seeming, for in truth we live in it” (63-4).

Humanity is immanent in its sensory perception and emotive depth. Literature however deeper the expression or representation remains tied to the constraints of the form and language even as it fights hard against these very boundaries. Their aesthetic works also instantiate the cravings of their authors to sense -to put it ever so lightly- and adumbrate (not so much as glimpse) an extra-sensory perception though not exactly para- or pre- but, in Wordsworthian dogma, ‘something far more deeply interfused,’ much more fundamental and irrefutable, like the blood coursing through us all alike which, being so light of touch and too ideologically riven, manifests in the great literary efforts too varied and too scarce. Yet it derives power and sustenance from this very lightness and elusiveness. Though it may sound like romantic or ideological manifesto, it is neither the one nor the other: not the former, because it is not the congealed rhetoric of an emotional surge despite its italicized underpinning; nor the latter, for it is itself a response to the politicization of the discourse in Africa and, as such, a strategic circumventing of the very concretions of political intent that may lend themselves to the instruments of hegemony.

Although Attwell’s description of it as “self-consciously textual performance”⁹ may stick right into the

face as a charge, it is all there is as far as an author's intervention (or one may preferably read activism, at least, in Coetzee's case) is concerned. "The deed is done, what power was available to me is exercised" (*Doubling* 250). That is what Dickens and Conrad did in their own ways. Despite the clamour of his critics, Coetzee's voice, to all intents and purposes, is that of dissent skirting the parochial and striking deeper into the infestation at the roots including, as Dominic Head puts it, "a resistance to the idea that literature must supplement -and so be in thrall to- an agreed history 'out there'"(x). Literature then must not "supplement history, but establish a position of rivalry with it" (x), more importantly, with "a power and a resonance beyond the narrow concerns of academia" (xi). Like the routes taken by Lucy and Lurie in *Disgrace* and Mrs. Curren in *Age of Iron*, undefined and unrecognized by any institutionalized authority, Coetzee tries to strike the untrodden (read unacademic) path to imagining the "moral community" as the white writer's "transcendental imperative"¹⁰ in South Africa with the "awareness of an idea of justice, somewhere, that transcends laws and lawmaking" (*Doubling* 340).

Chapter 4

Oyono's Old man and Ce's College youths

Usongo, K

OYONO'S *The Old Man and the Medal* and Chin Ce's *Gamji College* respectively constitute an indictment on colonial French and local African leaders for the economic, political, and social exploitation of the people of Africa. Both cases bequeath the culture of corruption and violence instituted and entrenched in colonial and post colonial administrations.

In *The Old Man and the Medal*, Meka, as a result of the medal that is offered to him by the Chief of the whites, is led to believe in the virtues of equality and brotherhood propagated by the colonizers. However, Meka's horrendous experience with the police chief, Gullet, awakens black consciousness regarding white hypocrisy. More than ever before, the blacks decry their marginalization by their oppressors and enkindle a revolutionary flame that shall arrest some of the abuses. In *Gamji College*, through the trajectory of Tai and Jerry,

we relive the tale of moral paucity that is characteristic of an independent African nation as the masses struggle to install some sanctity in the conduct of public affairs.

White on Black or Black on Black

The interaction between blacks/whites and blacks/blacks has been a familiar theme in most African writing, especially the novels dealing with the (post)colonial periods. While novelists like Chinua Achebe, Cyprian Ekwensi, Kenjo Jumbam and others have addressed this concern by generally indicating how blacks have often been outpaced by the dispensation proffered by the white world, Wole Soyinka and Ngugi wa Thiongo'o articulate instances of a matching resistance to Western influence. Ferdinand Oyono appears to tread the middle ground in this Africa-Europe confrontation. His submission shows an oppressed people that initially are naïve, but ultimately become aware of the tertiary role that is imposed on them by their oppressors. This is particularly the case of the villages of Doum and Zourian in *The Old Man and the Medal*. Meka, a veritable upshot of these twin villages, is subjected to harrowing series of exploitation, hypocrisy and injustice by the French. It is through his lenses that we view the lot of the oppressed black community.

On his part, the work of Chin Ce expose society and citizens who are disgusted with the conduct of black governments in a post colonial era. *Gamji College*, his second work of fiction, is illustrative of a nation that is putrid to the core as it rides on the crest of corruption. The final dissolution of its trumped-up presidential

election insinuates a flicker of hope that Gamji may emerge from its inglorious past as a rejuvenated and democratic entity that can jettison suicidal and greedy politics.

Informed by Paolo Freire, Liam Kane insists that committed art is the weapon of the 'oppressed' in a world run by 'oppressors' in the hope that their education can awaken them to the injustices inflicted on them by their oppressors (12). Therefore while Ferdinand Oyono's *The Old Man and the Medal*, working within the confines of post colonial criticism, may help us reappraise Europe's biased consideration of Africa as degenerate and totally needy of redemptive Western values, with Chin Ce's *Gamji College* we come to the understanding that Africa is not a show case of impeccable values as its body politic is ridden by vices that require urgent surgery. A meaningful, ideological alternative therefore is one that can synthesize the virtues of both camps and, at the same time, shun their predatory drives. Put simply, we are inferring a post-modern philosophy that promotes a society where no one is most important and no one is least important; a society where the minority is as equally important and relevant as the majority (Iwuchukwu 386).

The Old man retraces the bitter experiences of Meka and his kindred, on the one hand, and the travails of Gamji's students, on the other. It postulates that even though they are under the burden of (post)colonial administrations, they are eventually aware of the wars of discrimination and exploitation on them by their oppressors. In pursuing this line of action, the (post)colonial overlord disengages himself from the warning that we must be guided by a vision of the person

untainted by ideological and cultural prejudices or by political and economic interests which can instill hatred and violence (Benedict 4). We revisit the tedious path to enlightenment for these downtrodden people and indicate that, following their disillusionment, things will hardly be the same as when they had warmly embraced their leadership and, in the process, wallowed in various expectations.

Great Expectations

When Meka (The Old man) receives a summons from the Commandant, he loses his peace of mind as he is struck by insomnia. He is overwhelmingly anxious about what good fortune is appended to this strong invitation in the same way that the youthful Tai (in Gamji) braces himself for academic and moral edification at the College. The elderly Meka is, therefore, obliged to wake up his snoring wife, Kelara, to share in his excitement and he wonders how a woman, faced with the summoning of her husband before the white officer, can still enjoy the luxury of sleep: “Kelara! he roared, thumping her back. How can you sleep when your husband has troubles?” (3). At this bewildering moment, poor Meka, like Ngugi's Muthoni, can only resort to prayers as he implores God to protect him. He fails to fathom the *modus operandi* of French colonialism which was/is a thoroughgoing, comprehensive and deliberate penetration of a local or 'residential' system by the agents of an external system, who aim to restructure the patterns of organization, resource use, circulation and

outlook so as to bring these into a linked relationship with their own system (Brookfield 1-2).

Following this important call, Meka dresses smartly to impress the white man. After all, among the Fong of Cameroon, the name Meka signifies loyalty and submission, especially to colonial authority. He is compelled to wear his cockroach-infested jacket, which has been hanging on the wall for ages, as a mark of respect for the Commandant. His attire, coupled with the ancient helmet above his head, is truly exotic and, in the rollicking words of Kelara, he is “like an American missionary” (4). In line with subjectifying blacks to French administration, the white priest makes Meka believe that in surrendering his land to the church, he is fulfilling a divine wish that will earn him celestial joy. As a result, Meka is seen as a model Christian, one that will shudder from a taste of the local brew, arki, for fear of not only risking imprisonment, but guilt of committing mortal sin. Notice this subterfuge of the French that is reminiscent of the age-old anecdote of the colonization of Africa that the natives were cajoled into praying to God while the white colonizer tactfully dispossessed them of their land. In concomitance was the charade of Christianity as the new converts were reminded to love and obey their foes irrespective of the situation. By isolating Meka for distinction, the French oppressors favour selected leaders rather than promoting the community as a whole. The latter course, by preserving a state of alienation, hinders the emergence of consciousness and critical intervention in a total reality (Freire 143).

The scoop is the forthcoming decoration of Meka on the 14th of July by the great Chief of all the white men in Timba. Paradoxically, the French liberation festivities are intended to hoodwink the natives that they and the French are indivisible in the quest for liberty, fraternity and equality regardless of colour and/or race. There is ululation by the women following these tidings and men strive to identify themselves with the 'heroic' Meka. By evening, this news is embellished in the understanding that the President of France is specifically coming to Doum to decorate Meka. A certain eerie feeling envelops the imminent medalist in the light of these premature celebrations: "With these white men you never know" (17).

As Meka reluctantly drives away the festive women lest they usher some misfortune for him, he is convinced that his medal is hidden in a drawer in the Commandant's desk or in the keeping of the Chief of whites in Timba. Between this day and the 14th of July, he is restless; he is fearful that he may die as he awaits his medal. His worry is greatly compounded by his inability to determine his age. Being the first person called from among several blacks cued in front of the Commandant's office, Meka considers himself a seer among blind men and a crowing cock in the midst of hens. In the pompous words of the white Officer, Meka is distinguishable because

You have done much to forward the work of France in this country. You have given your lands to the missionaries, you have given your two sons in the war when they found a glorious death. (He wiped away an imaginary tear). You are a friend... The medal that we

are going to give you means you are more than our friend. (19)

Meka, then, sees himself wrestling with the wind in the quest for ultimate recognition. But Ignatius Obebé thinks differently; he views the medal as trivial and a hoax, and wishes that Meka wins a more rewarding medal that is void of colonial trappings, perhaps one of salvation.

Similarly, the college of Gamji has for some time been the pride of the natives as many youths had identified hope in this citadel of knowledge. Unfortunately, this institution has been steadily declining as marked by the political change from military autocracy to civilian democracy:

In three years of democratic *laissez faire*, when chief executives of federal, state and local governments -not to talk of college high lords gave vent their plundering mania, everything in town, not excluding the landscape, had become a ghost of its former self. (5)

From stinking hostels to the stench reeking in the drainage system, this college remains a blemish to academia to the extent that those who enroll there are considered inmates of filth. The likes of James and Peter attempt to enkindle some veneer of hope in freshmen. These two entreat Tai to attend a fellowship crusade on campus that will, they claim, be crowned with miracles.

Attempting to mollify Tai, James stresses that all human beings are one in the eyes of God and that they are all reflections of the divine image. In Gamji, politics

and religion constitute a curious blend hence the Rector's participation in the divine service. What is probably overlooked is the fact that the Rector is a nephew to His Excellency and that the marriage between politics and religion serves the goals of the politicians in deceiving and exploiting the poor. As the Squealer that he is, James warns Tai to guard against hypocritical and deceptive occult groups parading the university premises. The only safe fellowship is that of Gamji College that can contend the seductions of 'nefarious' cults sprouting on the campus. In other words, only the ruling regime can adequately satisfy the concerns of the majority; any opposition party should not be tolerated because it is myopic and diabolical. But very soon, this sweeping assertion, like Meka's bloated medal, will begin to dissipate.

Dream Fragmentation

Oyono shows that the various festivities organized in Meka's house on the eve of the medal award are at variance with local expectations. His compound bustles with animation and pride and poor Meka is compelled to stitch a special 'zazou' jacket, purchase shoes for the occasion. While his shoes greatly pain him, he apparently does not have an option if he has to appear decent before the white man. He is a determined man as evident in the clenching of his teeth in a bid to put on leather shoes. He finds it extremely difficult to walk and this is a subtle reminder of the friendship purported by the whites towards him and his compatriots.

Meka's increasing sleeplessness visibly portends the falsehood enshrined in the medal. He is anxious about its colour and size, but is consoled that it may not be a replica of a catechist's medallion nor resemble the inconsequential one won by Ignatius Obebé. It is only in this distinction in enormity that his fame shall rise, making him the envy of Doum and beyond. He overreaches himself when he imagines clasping the white man in a warm embrace and offering him a basket of eggs. His exuberance as the medal is pinned on his chest places him, in this appreciation of Ngugi wa Thiongo'o, as "an ugly savage screaming with gleaming white teeth and looking at the reassuring presence of his white master" (Heywood 6).

Regrettably, Meka is confounded to observe that while he stands alone in a painted circle under an excruciatingly hot sun, the whites take shelter in the shade of Father Vandermayer's veranda. The black recipient is abandoned to himself for unending hours, deprived of the warmth of his fellow Africans that are several feet away from him. He notices that not only is Pipiniaki's medal different from his, but the white merchant receives a reassuring embrace as the medal is carefully placed on his chest: "Then Meka saw the great Chief grasp his shoulder and put his cheeks one after the other against the cheeks of the Greek" (92).

When it is his turn, his medal is not only inferior in quality, but in place of an embrace, he gets a handshake from the Chief of the whites. The latter finds it condescending to rub his body against the sweaty bosom of Meka. A keen observer in the crowd aptly comments about the triviality of the medal in compensation for the

great sacrifice of Meka towards the French cause: “I think they ought to have covered him in medals. That would have been a bit more like it. To think he lost his land and his sons just for that...” (94)

This remark sends Kelara weeping profusely. It now dawns on her and her female folk that Meka had traded too much for too little; and that the medal is largely disproportionate to the two sons lost in a war. It is an antique as proven when Meka taps the holy Vandermayer to determine the lieu of the reception party; he is ignored by the white priest. This is a vivid illustration that the medal alone cannot break the social barriers between the blacks and the whites, and that the latter are hesitant to welcome attempts by the former to fully fraternize with them. Put differently, the acclaimed friendship is a veneer that cannot penetrate the skin colour.

Acting partly under the influence of wine, the blacks gulp down glasses of whisky to the disenchantment of the whites. In the words of Meka, “If you want to know what your friend thinks of you, drink a few glasses with him” (106). Armed with this conviction, he challenges the whites on the notion of brotherhood by inviting them for dinner at his compound. The High Commissioner politely turns down this offer intimating that because of his busy schedule, he can only partake of Meka's goat in spirit. Ironically, he feasts with the white medalist. His rebuff of Meka clearly underscores French hypocrisy and crystallizes black criticism of the love and friendship encapsulated in the medal. They are soon vindicated in that when the mood becomes festive in the Community Centre, the whites find this embarrassing and abandon the blacks to themselves. No sooner do they celebrate

their newly found freedom than Gullet and his men order them to quit the hall. They are now considered scallywags. Bit by bit, it dawns on the blacks that they had blown out of proportion the significance of the medal; they analysed it literally against the metaphorical exegesis of the French.

We can compare this treatment meted to the underdogs to that of the Nigerian story of Ce where draped in a green and white agbada, reminiscent of the national colours of Nigeria, President Baba Sonja, the Kadiye of the land, cuts a grotesque image before his younger national Tai: “The diseased-looking pot-bellied old man had never inspired him for once as a president” (18). After pouring several diatribes on youths for being injurious to the nation, this mischievous politician implores everybody to support him as he draws a fallacious link between him and God: “I call on everyone to support the vision of our country as directed by God” (18). Earlier on, the Parliament had exposed his chicanery by rejecting a proposed Bill that put God in the centre-spread of the national map. In these inflated words of the President lies the post colonial drive to dupe the nation and subvert the people's aspirations:

Arise Compatriots
God's holy call obey
To serve the Lord thy God
With ho-liness and faith
The labours of the saints ago
Shall no more be in vain
To serve the lord thy God
One na-tion bound in justice

Peace and Unity (19).

The stress in the words “ho--liness” and “na--tion” accentuates the falsehood of the politician in establishing a harmonious link between these two streams. Baba presents himself as an enlightened despot in that as God's representative on earth, he cherishes the welfare of the nation, especially the youths. The political pretence is unmistakable as we notice the sycophantic Dr Jeze describe the presidential 'speech' as the “Gamji declaration” (19). The President and his cronies ensure that the masses are brainwashed as the latter intone a new national anthem that extols the virtues of politics and religion. Rimi Merenge, the Head of State's alter ego, spares no effort in hailing the new leadership of Baba and imprecating youths for breeding the culture of skepticism, particularly within a college milieu. Leader Obu, the Pastor's partner in this hoax, reiterates the sinfulness of youths as he supplicates God to cleanse them of the vice of mistrust. The service culminates in the religious pranks of some fellowship members as they fling themselves to the ground in a spiritual frenzy intended to underscore the overriding power of prayers. Like the case of Oyono's story, religion is used by the administration to maintain a stronghold on the population.

As the President's acolytes –James and Peter– insist that Baba Sonja is a born again Christian and, therefore, an instrument of the Lord. Tai, like Soyinka's Igwezu, retorts that Baba is to blame for the collapse of the nation. Confronted by Tai's intransigence to attend campus service, the insidious duo intimate that he has

lately joined a cult or, connotatively, aligned with an opposition party.

In the second section of the story, Churchill decries the plight of the masses by situating them as victims of “Arrest and Detention. Advance and Deviance” (59). The citizens are perpetually subjected to various abuses orchestrated by their inept ruling governments. It may be posited that the youths in Gamji take alcohol as opium, a ruse by the despicable regime to deaden their consciences in the wake of state atrocities. As earlier stated, while the French ban the consumption of liquor in Doum and Zourian ostensibly to encourage the purchase of foreign brands, the Gamji government allows its subjects to drench in it for the purpose of docility.

As Churchill himself tells us, Gamji's rulers are, therefore, a reflection of petty tyrants across Africa that continuously harp on patriotism and sacrifice on the part of the oppressed citizenry as these leaders loot and plunder the economy, and stifle any opposition:

And he made a few flattering noises about sacrifice and patriotism from his country men, except of course some public enemies and politicians he had clamped in jai. (61)

Like most of the new nations born out of the ashes of colonialism, Gamji is a travesty of democracy and freedom. Such post colonial states resonate with various negations, says Churchill: “Everything that Machiavelli thought was possible in a Hobbessian state, those scumbags epitomized them all in the black man” (62). Their newfangled Presidents always abandon the object

and chase the shadow. Churchill succinctly captures this aberration in this remark: “Some fools started War against Indiscipline when it should have read War against Injustice” 1 (62).

Disillusionment

Be it in the case of Oyono's world or Ce's Gamji state, the masses successfully unveil the cloak of oppression and fathom the deception that has been progressively practised on them by (post)colonial authorities. Their experiences with the callous administration awaken their consciousness to the necessity to arrest the dehumanizing treatment to which they are being subjected. How and to what extent both communities succeed in severing ties with the agents of evil will be appraised in the following paragraphs.

As the blacks in Oyono's Old man scramble out of the Community Centre, Meka, dead drunk, is abandoned to himself in the collapsing building that is being buffeted by heavy rain and a violent storm. It is as if nature and the French are partners in this torture. He painfully wriggles himself out of the wreckage of the hall and is comforted that his Christian medal, Saint Christopher, is tenaciously clinging to his chest. However, the one given to him by the Chief of the whites is detached from his coat. Is this to remind him that the medal is simply a gimmick by the whites to cajole him into believing in their friendship, a loud-sounding nothing devoid of substance? He is soon apprehended by Gullet's men and manhandled as a criminal, a prowler in the European quarter. He is dragged in muddy water like an old sack,

kicked in his back, and insulted by a constable in spite of the fact that he identifies himself as the recipient of a French medal. Symbolically, Meka's loss of the medal is a subtle reminder to the blacks that, with minimum effort, they can shake off the colonial caste.

He is incarcerated on the flimsy charge of: "Loitering with suspicious intent... No lights, No papers... nothing..." (126). Like Ellison's invisible man, Meka and his peers have lost their identity within their fatherland, outlived their usefulness, and are enjoined to redefine their relevance to the white cause now that the latter wields the rein of power in the native land. In fact, Meka is now fit for the toilet or grave as the constables express their worry that in detaining him, he may taint the freshly painted walls of the cell. The inability of the constables to spell Laurence, Meka's Christian name which they write as Roro, supremely attests that he is a nonentity in the white administered Doum. It is while he is in detention that he is conscientized that he and his comrades had been systematically humiliated and pilfered by the colonial authorities. The mournful cry of the night bird is symbolic of their plight in the hands of a monstrous administration.

Early the next morning, the handcuffed Meka is brought before Gullet. The latter manifests his contempt for him by spitting in his face. As if in complete disillusionment, Meka responds to the question on his identity asked by Gullet thus: "I am a very great fool, who yesterday still believed in the white man's friendship" (135). Probably embarrassed by these words, Gullet slots a cigarette into Meka's mouth in an attempt to soothe the latter. This type of violence on the part of the

oppressors prevents the oppressed from being fully human (Freire, 1970:44). Meka's calm in the face of this provocation underlines his friendly temperament. He seems to either subscribe to Ghandist non-violence or adhere greatly to Blakian love in place of hate as evident in 'The little Black Child' where a black child professes love to a white child, not by precept, but by example: "And then I'll stand and strike his silver hair, / And be like him, and he will then love me" (Hunt 740).

Gullet's dismissive words to Meka constitute an innuendo as he informs the latter that he shall be given another medal and that he should always come along with a lamp to town. This utterance again situates Meka as one without an identity, one that is reminded to always sacrifice for the whites to notice his presence. The 'invisible' Meka is instructed to demonstrate his visibility through permanent support of French interest. This time, he is undeceived by French hypocrisy. His experience with Gullet remains deeply ingrained in his mind as thereafter it dawns on him that he was wooing a leopard. His disillusionment is total as inscribed in his words to a passer-by: "The whites...just the whites..." (140).

This realization ably represents his edification from his interaction with them; they remain chameleons and the beholder is perpetually challenged to identify their colour at each appearance. His closing words in the novel: "I'm just an old man now..." (167) reiterate the point that he has learnt an unpalatable lesson from the medal. The whites largely succeed in subduing the blacks because of the latter's generally submissive and receptive attitude. They eternalize the vice of neocolonialism which, to Kwame Nkrumah, is imperialism in its final

and perhaps its most dangerous form. The essence is that the State which is subject to it is, in theory, independent and has all the outward trappings of international sovereignty. In reality, its economic system and thus its political policy are directed from outside (Smith 1999-208).

Likewise in the representation of postcolonial Nigeria, the feeling of despair in Gamji is amply registered in the observations of Milord, Dogo and Femi. Milord is so disgusted with the opulence of evil in Gamji to the extent that he sees Bisi as a microcosm of these vices. Lacking in natural beauty, she is deeply meretricious, a symbol of the drifting freedom and democracy that the people are yearning for. The new nation is a shadow of itself as attested by the frequent power outages. The frustrations of the youths are reflected in the tramp lifestyles of Milord, Dogo and Femi with the one sleeping on the floor, the others puking from the window and toilet. It is as if they are venting their disappointment at the much acclaimed independence.

There is further discontentment in Gamji as evident in the short listing of five 'mad' men to run for the presidency. Napoleon, a belated contestant in the sixth position, is yet to buy the first round of drinks synonymous with the routine corruption characteristic of most presidential elections in Africa. We are definitely irked upon learning that his singular leadership trait is a predilection for cigarette brands:

He was wont to display the packets in long rows on his bookshelf. His sense of neat arrangement was impeccable

when it came to empty cigarette packs, empty boxes of matches and used up lighters. (81)

To exacerbate an already ugly scenario, he is notorious for violating orders, taunting women on their buttocks and wearing dark glasses at night. Deceptively professing neutrality, Napoleon opines a *de facto* law of most African presidential elections, especially the situation of incumbents: “No politician ever contemplates failure in this business” (82). As an afterthought, he affirms that if elections were to bar him from the State house, the pistol will smoothen his way. His *modus operandi* remains that “All problems, and their cures are at the tip of his fingers!” (86). Like most incipient tyrants, Napoleon declares that his race for the presidency is an attempt to rescue the masses from the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie. The audience is, of course, bored to listen to his balderdash, one that is in the tradition of Dickens' *Sleary*. Napoleon, like his five rivals, pours out the same mumbo-jumbo to the electorate. None is any different from the other in mediocrity.

Ce reveals how Gamji is evidently torn apart by the rival candidates clamouring for the presidency. These political crooks are largely identified along ethnic colorations (dominant/dominated, majority/minority, dark/fair etc) and not following credible, ideological positions geared at improving the welfare of the masses. The cumulative effect is the polarization of the nation along cardinal points-North/South, West/East. It is true to say that many [Gamjians] today see the state from the prism of their ethnic groups and the status, access and opportunities that accrue to them (Osaghae 55). Ipso

facto, the other five presidential candidates consolidate their bids by subverting the candidature of Napoleon on grounds of non-alignment. In other words, he has not sufficiently anchored himself within a specific ethnicity.

Following the above trend of demonization, it is not surprising that the political campaign degenerates into a mayhem. In the ensuing altercation a presidential candidate Ege –one who arguably rose above ethnic partisanship– is slain. Curiously, Ce's blend of native names (Ege) with foreign ones (Napoleon) allegorically represents the tussle for supremacy between local and foreign ideologies, between African assumptions and European ethics in Gamji.

Ultimately, the outcome of the election is a burlesque of justice. It is flawed by rigging and intimidation in the hope of making an indigenous candidate victorious: “Blood will flow... We will teach these strangers a lesson!” (112). Regrettably, Gamji College Fellowship negates its role as the watchdog of equity and fair play by instructing people to vote for M because of his so called divinity. The sick looking registrar that oversees the elections is symptomatic of an electoral system in dire need of reform. Jerry is discontented by the entire election procedure as he wonders aloud how many souls still have to be sacrificed so that Gamji becomes a civilized society. He quits the electoral commission convinced that the whole exercise is an insult to justice.

Predictably, the election is halted by violence that sweeps across Gamji. This new nation is in desperate need of definition following the contours of justice, freedom and democracy. It is not any better than Oyono's world. Both societies are crippled by the vices of

colonialism and post colonialism, dependence and independence; the quest for a consummate nationhood that fuses the genuine aspirations of the oppressed masses remains disturbingly elusive for Gamji.

Oyono structurally splits his novel into three parts corresponding to the expectations, broken dreams, and disillusionment of Meka as each section of the story tackles these triple phases of the hero's life in the process of pedagogy. It also mirrors the extended patience of the blacks against protracted French provocation. This sophisticated division seems to affirm the discrepancy between the promises of the French and their fulfillment. And that their word constitutes a veritable tossed yo-yo that clearly leaves aspirants frustrated. Indeed, Meka suffers from self deception as he earlier had confidence in the French; his final delusion by them is revealing as he and his brethren are tutored that in dinning with the French, they need a ladle in scooping the bowl. In other words, his experience constitutes a ringing challenge to his counterparts that they should be wary as they flirt with a hyena. Now, they have been sufficiently conscientized that the struggle for their rights must be initiated and sustained by them; it does not depend on the benevolence of the colonial master. They had been overtaken by their naivety and ignorance into believing that the medal was a magic wand to their problems. Far from it; the good is yet to come through their commitment in liberating themselves from the claws of oppression and its attendant vices.

Ce's Gamji College, aside its graphic illustrations depicting the shifting moods of the story, is also skillfully divided into three crucial phases, namely, "The Cross",

“The Bottle”, and “The Gun” respectively representing the intoxicating influence of the bible on the mindset; the liberating force of alcohol on people as they reveal their innermost minds; and the resultant violence and chaos unleashed by the gun –white man's legacy of brigandage in Africa. This meticulous structure reflects a floating society in need of justice, stability and peace; Gamji is miniature Africa grappling with the throes of independence as some of the injustices of colonialism are replayed.

While in Ferdinand Oyono's novel there is cautious optimism that Meka and his comrades can successfully break the chains of oppression and possibly get embroiled in the vicious cycle of anomaly typical of post colonial Gamji, Chin Ce's heroes seemingly do not present the same degree of commitment to stem the tide of violence. However, a common denominator between the people of both fictions is the self hallucination that leads to disillusionment triggered by (post)colonial forces. Despondent as the future may look for Gamji, a revolutionary flame is ignited in Tai and Jerry as both vituperate the ills of the new nation. The 'beautiful ones' are in the process of being born. They are seen as harbingers to a more embracing, political dispensation that may eschew the abuses and excesses of the preceding age. Gamji, Doum and Zourian will make ideal nations when they effectively harness solid Western principles of good governance and freedom alongside African values of brotherhood and communalism, or when they adroitly lubricate Western steel with African grease.

Chapter 5

Nadine Gordimer

Hichri, A

POWER systems essentially function through language. The authority of a dominant nation, race or social class allows for the creation of systems of thought which, in a sense, shape the experience, beliefs, and identity of subjected communities and reinforce their domination and coercion. These cognitive systems are reflected, endorsed, and validated by language and discourse. The dialectics of language and authority allows the discourse embodied by a dominant ideology to channel thought and confer upon it the status of scientific truth, thereby widening power asymmetry between the dominators and the dominated. This process of ideological and discursive (de)formation incarnated in modern South Africa mainly in the apartheid system is “a legal form of racial discrimination” which “advocates the separation of people in all levels of society on the basis of color” (Motlhabi 1) and secures the “political and economic domination” of “the African masses” by a racist white minority (Cabral 12). However, just as

economic and political domination under apartheid is secured through language, liberation from oppression and servitude manifests itself at the discursive level.

This feature is mainly explored by the South African writer Nadine Gordimer in her novel *July's People*. In this novel, Gordimer envisages South Africa as a dark and gloomy world where a black revolution occurs and where whites are defeated, dispossessed and ousted from their cities and homes. The family around whose circumstances the narrative revolves is the white family of Bam and Maureen Smales and their three children who find themselves sheltered from riots and burnings by July, their black servant, in his village. The novel records the repercussions of the violent uprising on the Smaleses and their inability to adjust to the primitive life of their servant and his tribe. Drawing on Linda Hutcheon's theories of irony and parody, Mikhail Bakhtin's elaboration on the notion of heteroglossia, and Gilles Deleuze's theory of deterritorialisation, we may unearth the discursive foundations of political hegemony to underscore their subversion in South Africa under the revolution.

Throughout the narrative Gordimer underlines apartheid's racial underpinnings and socio-economic manifestations mainly through depicting the relationship between the Smaleses and their black servant. Moreover, she explores the dynamics of power relations involved in their contact and their translation at the level of language and communication. In the process, she provides the reader with the different linguistic varieties inherent in her multiethnic and multiracial society, while assigning to each class its own linguistic repository. Indeed, the

narrative is infused with expressions pertaining to South African dialects such as Afrikaans and Zulu. Words like “bakkie,” “rondavel,” “veld,” “baas,” “donga,” “vlei,” “mealie” (92), “induna” (112), and “Fanagalo” (127) serve as substitutes for words with a similar meaning used in Standard English. A “bakkie,” for instance, which is a van with an open back, is used to describe the vehicle owned by the Smales family, whereas “rondavel” designates the conical-roofed huts inhabited by July and his tribe. “Veld,” “donga,” and “vlei” are used to refer respectively to an open grass land used for farming, a low-lying ground, and a valley, while “baass” and “induna” are the equivalents of “boss” and “chief.” Finally, “mealie” is Afrikaans for maize and “Fanagalo” is the name of one of the Pidgin languages of South Africa which mixes aspects of English with some elements of Zulu and Afrikaans.

This socio-linguistic concern significantly sets the standards for the stratification that governs South African society under apartheid as well as the power relations ensuing from it. Indeed the two social classes depicted in *July's People* are the upper-middle class and the lower-working class. While the first is represented by the Smales family, the second is represented by their servant July and his tribe. Such a division is underlined by the different linguistic practices of each of these two groups. If the Smaleses adopt a standard form of English as a means of communication, then their servant makes use of a pidginised form of the same language to communicate with his white employers. The first instance of Pidgin, or “Fanagalo,” is recorded in the second chapter where

Maureen and July discuss the latter's attempt to appropriate the Smaleses' "bakkie:"

They know, they know what it is happening, the trouble in town. The white people are chased away from their houses and we take. Everybody is like that, isn't it? [...] How they know I'm not driving? Everybody is know I'm living fifteen years in town, I'm knowing plenty things. (13)

The inconsistency in grammar and syntax displayed by these utterances attests to the utilitarian and pragmatic nature of the communication occurring between July and Maureen, while reasserting the antagonistic power relations inherent in apartheid South Africa. For July, the English language is simply a means for convincing Maureen to give him the vehicle and allow him to drive it in town, the "bakkie" being for him a symbol of authority of which his masters are to be divested once they are in his 'place.' In this passage, the hegemonic relationship between Maureen and July is underlined by the pidginised English the latter uses and which becomes a symbol for his inferiority and servitude.

The linguistic division is also reinforced by the racial schism between the white liberal family and their black servant, a feature discernible in the following passage where Maureen recalls her family history and questions her father's treatment of his black servants:

The shift boss Jim spoke the bastard black lingua franca of the mines, whose vocabulary was limited to orders given by whites and responses made by blacks. An

old story that she had been ashamed - when she had married her liberal young husband - of a father who had talked to his 'boys' in a dialect educated blacks who'd never been down a shaft in their lives regarded as an insult to their culture; now he, the husband, was to be submitted to her being ashamed of that shame. (45)

The oppression and subjugation exerted by the father on his 'boys' as depicted in the passage clearly mirrors Marx's claims about the strategies whereby the ruling class tends to dominate the proletariat in capitalist society:

The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas, i.e., the class which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time its ruling intellectual force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that thereby, generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it. (64)

In the passage quoted earlier, the father's position of authority is not only underscored by his ownership of the means of material production, but it is also secured by his appropriation of his servants' means of mental production and his ability to monitor their inner thoughts. Racially and historically over-determined, the black mine workers are insulted by a restrictive variety of English, the "bastard lingua franca of the mines" (*People* 45), whose aims are transactional rather than interactional and which thus reinforces their subjugation and humiliation.

The father's assertion of his authority as a representative of the "ruling intellectual force" is substantiated by his use of this same variety, the "Fanagalo" of his servants, in communicating with them in the workplace. This reductive means of communication evinces the father's "control" and "policing" of his servants' enunciations (Foucault, *History* 18), thereby underscoring the relative rank and economic status of each class and reasserting the utilitarian foundations of class relations in apartheid South Africa.

From a cursory reading, language seems to mirror with precision the dynamics of power relations under apartheid. The linguistic stratification that governs the interaction among characters evidences the fact that "the ruling ideas" of apartheid South African society "are nothing more than the *ideal* expression" of its "dominant material relationships" (emphasis added) (Marx and Engels 64). As such, rather than merely deploying the "ideas of dominance" instituted by apartheid, language equally allows "material relationships" to be "grasped as ideas" by the different shades of the social spectrum (64).

At a deeper level of interpretation, however, Gordimer's narrative reveals how the discursive forms involved in blacks' intellectual disciplining are appropriated, parodied, ironized, and ultimately subverted by the black community in South Africa under the revolution. Indeed just as it validates and widens the divide between blacks and whites under apartheid, language marks the reversal of conventional hierarchies in times of insurrection. This reversal is underlined through Gordimer's incorporation of the trope of irony in the texture of the novel. The use of words, phrases and

structures loaded with a dual significance clearly points out the ironic nature of revolutionary discourse, a feature perceptible in the confrontations between Maureen and July. One of these confrontations occurs when the two characters discuss the latter's appropriation of the Smaleses' "bakkie" by keeping the keys with him:

-You don't like I must keep the keys. Isn't it? I can see all the time, you don't like that.-

She began to shake her head, arms crossed under her breasts, almost laughing; lying, protesting for time to explain-

-No, I can see. But I'm work for you. Me, I'm your boy; always I'm have the keys of your house. Every night I take that keys with me in my room, when you go away on holiday, I'm lock up everything...it's me I've got the key for all your things, isn't it-

-July, I want to tell you-

The ten fingers of his hand, held up, barred what she thought, she wanted. -In your house, if something it's getting lost it's me who must know. Isn't it? All your things is there, it's me I've got the key, always it's me-

-July, you don't ask me-

-Your boy who work for you. There in town you are trusting your boy for fifteen years. - His nostrils were stiff dark holes. The absurd 'boy' fell upon her in strokes neither appropriate nor to be dodged. Where had he picked up the weapon? The shift boss had used it; the word was never used in her house [...]

They had moved close together. She put a fist, hard claim, upon his arm.

-No. No. You don't like I must have these keys.-

-July you don't ask me-you're just telling me. Why don't you let me speak? Why don't you ask me?-

He drew his head back to his steady neck, to look at her.

-What you going to say? Hay? What you can say? You tell everybody you trust your good boy. You are good madam, you got good boy. (*People* 69-70)

In the above conversation duality appears in the rhetoric July deploys in order to justify his appropriation of the keys of the "bakkie." From a cursory reading, the overuse of the word "boy" in the phrases "your boy" (repeated three times), "good boy" (repeated twice), and "the boy" appeals to the emotions and presents July as an obedient, docile and faithful servant. The reiteration of his complaints: "you don't like I must keep the key," "you don't like I must have these keys," "you don't like that" (69), "you don't like I must have these keys," "you worry about your keys," and "you don't say you trust for me" (70) likewise infuses the scene with a great deal of pathos. However, at a deeper level of understanding, July's claims can be seen as instances of understatement whereby he manifests his inferiority and servitude only to be able to assert his authority in the present situation. In fact his apparent submission is implicitly and paradoxically accompanied with a strong assertion of his power and dominance. In Deleuze's and Guattari's expression his utterances "open words onto unexpected internal intensities" (22). As such, his grumblings, "it's me I've got the key for all your things" and "it's me I've got the key," not only symbolize his appropriation of the vehicle but also attest to his full control over the

Smalese's life and possessions. In addition, his apparently "asignifying intensive utilization" (22) of the word "boy" is laden with irony and ambiguity. Far from constituting a mark of "poverty of his language" (23), this word becomes a double-edged weapon.

In the new context in which it is inserted it supplants the restrictive economy of July's language with "a new sobriety, a new expressivity" and "a new flexibility" (23). In addition to reclaiming the social division between July and the Smalese such a segregationist word stands as a strong offence addressed towards Maureen, an accusation whereby she is considered a racist person who treats her servant as a slave. This notion is confirmed by Gordimer's description of the effect of such an "absurd" (*People* 69) insult on Maureen's nerves. In this respect, the equivocal meaning of the word "strokes" which literally signifies both "caresses" and "blows"¹ perfectly mediates the dual effect of the word "boy." In fact, such a derogatory form of address can neither be appreciated by a white liberal South African who ostensibly never treats blacks as inferior nor artfully evaded as such an action would further incriminate Maureen with a racist attitude.

As the conversation progresses, July's rhetoric gains momentum and overpowers Maureen's attempts at defending her position:

-She speak nice always, she pay fine for me when I'm getting arrested, when I'm sick one time she call the doctor.-He gave a laugh like a cry.- You worry about your keys. When you go away I'm leave look after your dog, your cat, your car you leave in the garage. I mustn't forget water your plants. Always you are telling me even

last minute when I'm carry your suitcase, isn't it? Look after everything, July. And you bringing nice present when you come back. You looking everywhere, see if everything it's still all right. Myself, I'm not say you're not a good madam-but you don't say you trust for me. - It was a command. - [...]

-The master he think for me. But you, you don't think about me, I'm big man, I know for myself what I must do. I'm not thinking all the time for your things, your dog, your cat.-

-The master. Bam's not your master. Why do you pretend? Nobody's ever thought of you as anything but a grown man. [...]

-You not going pay me, this month?-

-Pay you! She glowed and lashed. He continued a kind of fastidious pretence of insensitivity to a coarse and boring assault. [...]

-I'm the boy for your house, isn't it? - He made a show of claiming a due. (70-71)

In her definition of ironic discourse Hutcheon argues that "irony is the trope of the redeployable and the refracted as well as simply of the double, but doubleness seems to provide fertile ground for its usage" (164). In the above-quoted conversation the irony of July's utterances seems to "refract," deflect, and displace his language from the realm of submission to that of domination. His lamentations thus acquire the imposing character of commands and his use of the word 'master' further disarms and incriminates Maureen with a racist attitude, thereby 'redeploying' his speech in her humiliation. July's melodrama reaches its climax as he

asks for his pay, a directive whereby he reasserts the material and transactional nature of their relationship.

The same ambiguity can be well detected in a later passage where the reversal of the conventional hierarchy between July and the Smaleses is dramatized through July's self-assurance and control over the current situation:

[...] He leaned his back against the wheel of the bakkie. Pride, comfort of possession was making him forget by whose losses possession had come about.

-The fighting must be very bad.-

-You heard something what they say? - [...]

For him too, there had always been something to say: the servant's formula, attuned to catch the echo of the master's concern, to remove combat and conflict tactfully, fatalistically, in mission-classroom phrases, to the neutrality of divine will. -My, my, my. What can we do. Is terrible, everybody coming very bad, killing...burning... Only God can help us. We can only hope everything will come back all right. (94-95)

July's inquiries in this passage about whether violence has ceased in the city can be understood as a manifestation of his concern for his employers' safety. However, they are also quite revealing about his eagerness to hear news that report more fighting and reinforce his authority in the present situation. In fact, through his "schizophrenic mélange" (Deleuze and Guattari 26) of Pidgin and "mission-classroom phrases" (*People* 95), July deterritorialises² his masters' language and creates of it a "Harlequin costume in which very

different functions of language and distinct centres of power are played out” (Deleuze and Guattari 26).

The ambiguity and duality of July’s language and its deterritorialisation from the realm of subservience is accounted for in a later passage where Maureen’s uneasiness with regard to her servant’s attitude is dramatized:

She had never been afraid of a man. Now comes fear, on top of everything else, the fleas, the menstruating in rags -and it comes from this one, from him, not physical, anyway, but in herself. How was she to have known, until she came here, that the special consideration she had shown for his dignity as a man, while he was by definition a servant, would become his humiliation itself, the one thing there was to say between them that had any meaning.

Fifteen years

Your boy

You satisfy

She walked away and sat on a mud ruin, sending her gaze far from them - from him, from her - over the grey and green bush [...] where crossed date-lines eliminate time and there are no horizons. (98-99)

Here Gordimer highlights Maureen’s trauma and abjection. In Kristeva’s terms, the abject is that which “disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite” (4). Maureen’s fear and inability to fathom her servant’s attitude illustrates the way his presence disturbs her supremacist identity and crosses the

sacred border between self and other that she has internalised through her colonial upbringing. In this respect the excessive use of the word “one” and the objective pronoun “him” in referring to July denotes not only his mysterious attitude but also Maureen’s alienation from him and her revulsion at his unfamiliar conduct. July becomes an abstraction for Maureen and a symbol of the unknown destiny that awaits her in her helpless situation.

The “sense of the abject” (Kristeva 6) that haunts Maureen thus gives rise to the dialectic of master and slave between her and July. In this context the two characters seem to exchange their relative ranks in a situation characterised by a power reversal that foregrounds the Hegelian “master-slave dialectic.” According to Hegel, the “master” is a “consciousness” (61) that defines itself in communal relation to the slave’s consciousness -a process of negotiation and mutual interdependence. “Thus [the master] is not certain of existence-for-self as the truth; rather, his truth is the inessential consciousness and the inessential action of the latter [i.e. the slave]” (61). Indeed, through asserting his superiority in the new situation, July assumes the role of the master whose identity gets redefined in terms of dominance. In contrast Maureen’s present uncertainty with regard to her superior “existence-for-self as the truth” further undermines her status and shatters her self-confidence. July thus embodies for her the horror of an “abjection” that is “sinister, scheming, and shady: a terror that disassembles, a hatred that smiles” (Kristeva 4). Thus the resonance of July’s “shady” utterances “Fifteen years,” “Your boy” and “You satisfy” in Maureen’s

traumatized consciousness evidences his ability to dissemble his authority in the new situation, while underscoring her inferior status and her total reliance on him for protection and survival. Such instances of communication between the two characters certainly assert July's claims to dominance through appropriating the Smaleses' possessions and simulating their colonial discourse, thereby evincing the role of language in subverting the dominant order from within. This feature can be further investigated from Bakhtin's theory of language and heteroglossia.

In Bakhtin's theory of the novel, any language is made up of multiple "languages" internally stratified "into social dialects, characteristic group behaviour, professional jargons, languages of the authorities [...], languages that serve the socio-political purposes of the day, even of the hour" (*Imagination* 262-263). Language is then a feature of social and historical diversity and of relations of power and domination in any given culture. Language is also viewed as a site of conflict dictated by antagonistic power relations. Such a notion is inextricably connected to Bakhtin's view of the novel as a genre that best represents the social and "ideological voices" and discourses of its era (263). An "indispensable prerequisite" for the novel is, in Bakhtinian terms, this "internal stratification present in every language at any moment of its historical existence," a feature that he identifies as "heteroglossia" or the interweaving of different registers in the text of the novel (263). *July's People* thus clearly embodies Bakhtin's conception of the novel as a "diversity of social speech types" and "individual voices, artistically organized" (262). The

interweaving of two varieties of the same language, Standard English and Pidgin English in the texture of the novel, with the first version to impart the Smaleses' thoughts and attitudes as those of the ruling class, and the second version to report the speech of July and his primitive community, serves to back up this notion.

However, Gordimer moves beyond the archetypal stratification of these types of discourse in order to note the forces that govern the relationship between them. Among the peculiarities of Bakhtinian theory is its identification of two contradictory tendencies governing the “dialogue” between the different discourses of the novel and their representatives. The first one is identified as the “centripetal” force or the tendency towards ideological unification (270). It is incarnated in the way language and culture work in the direction of the establishment of a unitary or monoglossic language that colludes with an officially recognized set of values. This tendency is countered by a “centrifugal” force which aims at the decentralization of language and manifests itself in the endless developing of new forms that parody and criticize the pretentious ambition towards a unitary language (270). The tension between ‘centripetal’ and ‘centrifugal’ tendencies in the novel is best elicited in the above-quoted conversations between Maureen and July. At the surface level, July endorses the ‘centripetal’ significance of the word “boy” in an attempt to ingratiate the Smaleses and prove his loyalty and obedience. At a deeper level of understanding, however, he exploits the ‘centrifugal’ significance of such a racial slur in their incrimination, thereby underscoring the reversal of powers inherent in the current situation. In the same vein,

July's grumblings perfectly incarnate the centripetal tendency of the "servant's formula, attuned to catch the echo of the master's concern" (*People* 94-95). Nonetheless, in the context in which they are placed, they acquire a centrifugal force which allows them to subvert the master's authority.

The same significance can be attributed to July's use of the words "back" and "master." For Maureen, the locative "back" (95), used by her servant to refer to her past in the city and her former position of authority, is understood as the parodying double of the phrase "back there"(57), which denotes her nostalgia for the happy memories of a distant past. July thus strips the word of its centripetal significance in order to infuse it with a centrifugal force that draws attention to Maureen's current position of servitude. The same process is undertaken with the word "master," which acquires a dual significance throughout the quasi-disputes between the two characters. Such a word aptly represents the conflict between the centripetal forces that symbolise for July the conventional vertical relationship between the dominators and the dominated, and the centrifugal tendencies that uncover the racist attitude inherent therein.

This particular intermingling of the centripetal and centrifugal forces of discourse is quite revealing with regard to the reversal of social relations in the novel. In fact, July is not only the rebel who espouses the centrifugal tendency in order to subvert a dominant order but also the one who sets the rules of the game by endorsing the centripetal force and suiting it to his own motives. Through the interplay between the two forces,

July achieves full mastery over the situation. Furthermore, by his sheer adherence to centripetal discourse, his rhetoric becomes harmful and offensive to Maureen who, being disarmed and overpowered by his speech, experiences the poignancy of the reversal that undermines her supremacy. This notion is corroborated by July's use of Pidgin English in interacting with her. This variety of English reclaims the material basis of their relationship, thereby divesting Maureen of her humanity. Moreover, it reminds her of her father's racist past and the way he insulted his 'boys' through using the "bastard lingua franca of the mines" which "educated blacks who'd never been down a shaft in their lives regarded as an insult to their culture" (45).

The duality and duplicity characterizing the interaction between July and Maureen conspicuously illustrate the workings of dialogized discourse within the texture of the novel. *July's People* equally fulfils the functioning of Bakhtin's notion of heteroglossia at the diegetic level, mainly through incorporating Gordimer's subversive discourse "*in another's language*," and expressing "authorial intentions" in a "refracted way" (*Imagination* 324), hence the novel's translation of the author's revolutionary stance towards apartheid aberrations. Heteroglossia, in this sense, becomes a prominent feature of the narrative in that it simultaneously "enters the novel in person," i.e. in the guise of July's persona, and "determines, as a dialogizing background, the special resonance of novelistic discourse" (332).

Such resonance lies in the core meaning of the word revolution. In the *Oxford English Dictionary*, this term designates a "forcible overthrow of a government or

social order, in favour of a new system.” The ambiguity of the word is nonetheless asserted by another connotation ascribed to it by the French Dictionary *Littré*, which states that revolution implies the “return of a star to its point of departure.”³ Indeed, this significance is quite relevant for an understanding of the black character’s “symbolic decrowning” (Bakhtin, *Problems* 124) of his white masters. July’s ironic and parodic “return” to his masters’ racist discourse underlines his ability to disengage this discourse from the realm of the Smaleses’ dying authority and “reterritorialise” (Deleuze 20) it in his newly acquired realm of supremacy. In this sense, July’s pidginised utterances “oppose the oppressed quality of [his] language to its oppressive quality” (27), a fact that allows him to overthrow the dominant order from within. It is thus incontrovertible that Gordimer deploys her character’s persona to fashion an oppositional system of belief with the ultimate objective of “detaching the power of truth from the forms of hegemony, social, economic, and cultural, within which it operates” (Foucault, “Truth” 253).

Gordimer’s extensive use of irony and ambiguity at the level of narration clearly marks her attempt to parody realistic norms and eschew their distorted vision of apartheid realities. Through sloughing off the representational and referential character of language and moving towards “its extremities” and “limits,” Gordimer’s revolutionary narrative eschews the “informational myth in order to evaluate the hierarchic and imperative system of language as a transmission of orders, an exercise of power or of resistance to this exercise” (Deleuze and Guattari 23). This linguistic

practice acquires a twofold function in which language is presented as a tool that unveils both the intricate workings of ideology and the reversal of power in South Africa under the revolution. The challenge posed by Gordimer's novel is thus "to use the existing language, even if it is the voice of a dominant other -and yet to speak through it: to disrupt the codes and forms of the dominant language in order to reclaim speech for itself" (New x). Gordimer's narrative thus "reclaim[s] speech" for the voiceless black community of South Africa. In this respect, her black character's hold over his masters' colonial discourse ultimately illustrates the idea that language is not only "that which translates struggles or systems of domination," but is also "the thing for which and by which there is struggle, ...the power which is to be seized" (Foucault, "Discourse" 53). Gordimer's narrative therefore insinuates that discourse is the power that allows the black community to move beyond silence and subjection and reconstitute its identity in an egalitarian and apartheid-free society.

Chapter 6

Doris Lessing and Bessie Head

Kirton, T

I

LITERARY comparison between writers of diverse races eventually reveals the varied experiences in their lives and their writing. Similarities abound, for instance, in how women writers of Southern Africa, regardless of race, have treated the subject of the oppressive conditions under which they lived. In order to explore these similarities, some selected works of two significant Southern African authors, Doris Lessing, white, middle class and Bessie Head, coloured and impoverished, will be analysed in this study.

Lessing presents the point of view of a troubled white woman residing in Rhodesia, whereas Head presents a similar view from the perspective of a racially mixed person who is suffering from the psychological scars of poverty and abandonment while growing up in South Africa and later residing in Botswana. In addition both authors have rendered literary constructions that spotlight the subjugation and inequality concomitant within the Southern African society during the apartheid era.

Deirdre LaPin in her chapter “Women in African Literature” discusses how women use their writing in order to gain an identity and make their voices heard by the rest of society. She states: “When society does not grant women the power to make choices, women must summon the courage to claim that right for themselves” (159). Lionnet expands on this point by claiming: “women writers are often especially aware of their task as producers of images that both participate in the dominant representations of their culture and simultaneously undermine and subvert those images by offering a re-vision of familiar scripts” (205).

American feminist theorist, bell hooks, argues that black women as a group find themselves in an unusual position in their society as their overall status is lower than other social groups, resulting in sexist, racist and classist oppression (144). She also notes how white women and black men can have dual roles as both oppressor and oppressed in society. Black men are victims of racism; however, their sexist behavioural attitude allows them to have power over the women in society. Similarly, white women face oppression by the males in their society while racism allows them to hold power over both black men and women in society (144).

This theory effectively describes the position of the women of colour in the African worlds of Doris Lessing and Bessie Head where the women find themselves subjugated and deeply affected by gender inequality. Head emphasises the everyday experiences of both Botswanan and South African women and their oppression in her short story, “The Collector of Treasures.” This story depicts oppressive attitudes of men

in Head's own and her character Dikeledi's life. Head struggles to understand the male psyche and their abuse of women, and her confusion propels her to interrogate African male hegemonic viewpoints on life. Her desire to interrogate the mentality of men is reinforced through Dikeledi's thoughts: "Since that kind of man was in the majority in the society, he needed a little analyzing as he was responsible for the complete breakdown of family life" ("Treasures" 59). Dikeledi mentions this while she is discussing men in general and analysing them into different categories in society.

"The Collector of Treasures" portrays the majority of men in African society, who mistreat women and envision them as inferior. Dikeledi describes a type as sex-driven and almost canine in carnal lusts, with the belief that women exist in order to satisfy sexual needs. Further, she also portrays a minority of decent men in society, those who compassionately care for their women, treating them with equality and kindness. This is how Dikeledi describes this second type: "There was another kind of man in society with the power to create himself anew. He turned all his resources, both emotional and material, towards his family life" (60). The fact that few men valued and respected their wives and families add to Dikeledi's inability to understand and accept the patriarchal views in society.

Dikeledi's husband, Garesego, is an example of the first type of male as he believes that Dikeledi must faithfully obey him and perform her specific gender role, that of being a mother and homemaker. Furthermore, he also maintains that the other women in society exist for his own sexual pleasures. Garesego reinforces this

viewpoint in his promiscuity as, to him; it was acceptable for a man to have many sexual partners: “Even during his lean days he had a taste for womanizing and drink; now he had the resources for a real spree. He was not seen at home again and lived and slept around the village from woman to woman” (60). Dikeledi, on the other hand, is expected not only to accept his promiscuous behaviour but also provide a safe environment for his children.

Education also proves a tool used to oppress the women. Garesego believes that education allowed women to have more confidence and, in essence, more power in society thus making them not as submissive as they ought to be: “Garesego said at that time that he’d rather be married to my sort than the educated kind because those women were stubborn and wanted to lay down the rules for men” (“Treasures” 63). Education empowered women; therefore, Garesego feels threatened by educated women and rather prefers them uneducated so that they would remain more compliant and submissive.

Irigaray’s theory that explores the identity and worth of women as a group by investigating the social roles imposed on them by men can be applied to Garesego’s chauvinism. Her theory is centred on sexual pleasure and how women are categorised according to men’s evaluation of them in this regard (808). “Mother, virgin, prostitute: these are the roles imposed on women. The characteristics of (so-called) feminine sexuality derive from them: the valorization of reproduction and nursing; faithfulness; modesty, ignorance of and even lack of interest in sexual pleasure” (808). In Head’s story Garesego’s use of the females for his own sexual needs

would seem to be in line with two of the three categories of women portrayed by Irigaray. Badoe expands on this viewpoint of women as she argues that African women find themselves in one of either two categories when described by their male counterparts. They are either seen as “rootsie rural sisters or ravaged urban whores” (102). The label of “ravaged urban whore” placed on some female characters is reinforced in the statement: “The attraction of this particular woman for Garesego Mokopi, so her former lovers said with a snicker, was that she went in for heady forms of love-making like biting and scratching” (“Treasures” 68).

Head creates the contrasting gentleman of Paul in the story too. He is a male who does not look down upon the women in his life; instead he views them as being of equal status with himself. Unlike Garesego, he treats his wife, Kenalepe, with respect; thus they have a desirable marriage and a healthy sex life. Paul, therefore, represents a minority of African men that exist in Head’s culture. As a result of this, Paul contributes to Dikeledi’s desire to transform her situation as he illustrates to her that there are men that exist in society who are not sex-crazed like Garesego, and who do respect women for their worth.

It is at this point in the story that Dikeledi decides that this is how she ought to be treated by a man as she too deserves love and respect. This is obvious when she voices her agreement with Paul’s opinion that she is a good woman. “It was the truth and the gift was offered like a nugget of gold. Only men like Paul Thebolo could offer such gifts. She took it and stored another treasure in her heart” (67). For the first time in her life, Dikeledi has

gained a sense of self-worth and the confidence to stand firm against the oppressive behaviour of the evil male in her life.

In a patriarchal society like Dikeledi's the men lay down the rules for the expected behaviour of women; thus, it is the men who demand that the women should behave in a submissive and obedient way. Perhaps, if women could change their behaviour from that expected of them by men, they will challenge their oppressors, but their negative attitude maintains their subjugation and makes them compliant in their own oppression.

Dikeledi has reached a stage in her life where she can no longer undergo the suffering of living with a husband who endorses oppression. Her special relationship with Paul, her ability to raise her children alone and her sense of sisterhood with Paul's wife are all the premises which lead Dikeledi to the conclusion that she needs to gain her economic, physical and emotional independence. However, it is in response to repression and subjectivity that Dikeledi learns to believe in herself, regardless of gender bias and social censure. Thus Head uses Dikeledi, a woman who can no longer endure the continual patriarchal oppression and societal inferiority, to pose a challenge to masculinity and male stereotype in the text.

In order for Dikeledi to escape from the stressful situation in which she finds herself, she murders Garesego by cutting off his genitalia. Interestingly, the fact that she will be convicted of manslaughter does not deter her for she realises that she can no longer live under the prevailing oppressive conditions. She almost boasts to her son that she killed Garesego and commands that he

invite the police to arrest her: “I have killed him,’ she said, waving her hand in the air with a gesture that said - well, that’s that. Then she added sharply: ‘Banabotho, go and call the police” (73). Dikeledi’s hand gesture illustrates her feeling of victory over the man in her life and her triumph of his murder that ultimately frees her and her children from Garesego’s clutches.

The manner in which Dikeledi murders her husband has symbolic meaning in the story. Head incorporates this method of murder into the plot in order to illustrate how, by Dikeledi slicing off Garesego’s penis, she is in essence taking away his manhood -the symbol of his authority in society. In this way his phallocentric power is removed and she makes herself of equal status with her husband. This symbolic murder is also indicative of the reversal of roles in the text; Dikeledi is the one in the relationship with all the power as Garesego is defeated by her. “And Garesego bellowed. He bellowed his anguish. Then all was silent. She stood and watched his death anguish with an intent and brooding look, missing not one detail of it” (73). Dikeledi attentively observes the suffering of her husband before he bleeds to death; in her moment of triumph and catharsis she watches his demise.

It is important to note that Dikeledi’s crime is not unique as she is not the only woman in the story that resorts to murdering her husband in this particular manner. This is almost becoming a trend as there are four other women in prison for the same crime of murdering their husbands. Thus other women are also reframing their roles in their relationships with men as the prison warden notes: “So, you have killed your husband, have you?” ... ‘You’ll be in good company. We have four

other women here for the same crime. It's becoming the fashion these days" (54). Head incorporates this into the story in order to illustrate how terrible it was for these women to live in a patriarchal society, and the only way to "free" themselves from their situation was to eliminate their husbands permanently, destroying them for the sake of their families. Imprisonment is viewed as a better option for these women rather than living in the incarceration of patriarchy.

Bessie Head continues the theme of female suffering and oppression in her novel, *A Question of Power*, as a way of expressing her views on oppression. Here she also explores the effects of patriarchy on the women from an alternative angle and in more detail than "The Collector of Treasures" but she takes this theme to a new level. Unlike Dikeledi who commits a heinous crime in resistance to patriarchy, *A Question of Power*'s main character Elizabeth actually mirrors Head's own experience of a nervous breakdown. Head also highlights mental illness in the novel to inform her audience of her own predicament and that of black African women in general.

The fact that Elizabeth's life is harassed by the male characters of Dan and Sello, which are only figments of her imagination, illustrates how patriarchy is an inescapable part of her life. These men are ever-present and communicate with her in every situation she faces. She appears to feel totally trapped by Dan and Sello and their constant governance. Her sense of entrapment is reiterated in the quote: "...the fearful thing was that Dan had decided that he was a much better manager of the universe than Sello. What was eating him was that no

prophecies had preceded him; and yet in some way he had gained directorship of the universe in 1910” (25). Furthermore, Elizabeth emphasises the oppression of women by making an interesting comparison between Hitler and Dan. “He had not yet told the whole of mankind about his ambitions like Hitler and Napoleon, to rule the world” (14). In this way she illustrates exactly how much power Dan, and the male characters in general, have or believe they have in her society. Through this comparison Elizabeth substantiates the point that men will do anything to rule the world; no matter how much destruction they cause, their aim is to gain and retain power over other members of society they deem weaker or inferior, particularly women.

Interestingly, male hegemony begins at an early age as revealed by the relationship between a mother and her son in the novel. Although the son is a child, he shows no respect for his mother, an elder, by speaking to her as if she were of inferior status. This is evident when he reprimands her because the food is not ready: “She heard the other small boy set up a loud argument with his mother in the kitchen. He was very domineering. He moaned: ‘You haven’t any lunch for me, and I’m so hungry.’ ‘Lunch will be ready in a few minutes, Jimmy’, his mother said. ‘Well hurry up about it,’ Jimmy said offhandedly” (59). In a similar vein, Elizabeth can easily relate to this relationship between parent and child as this is a replica of her relationship with her own son, in the text, who is also domineering and demanding, resembling the adult male characters in their society. Male children mimic the behaviour of male adults and thus act like the domineering male roles. Elizabeth compares Jimmy, the

bad-mannered child, to her own son: “Elizabeth could see that this little Jimmy, like her own son, was an imitator of some other adult in that household” (59). Thus the male children acquire the ways of the adult males who treat their wives with disrespect, and which results in their treating their mothers also with lack of respect.

This behaviour and the roles imposed on men and women can be investigated using the theory of Judith Butler who argues that gender is performative and men and women perform the roles that are applicable to their specific gender. Butler claims: “the body becomes its gender through a series of acts which are renewed, revised and consolidated through time” (902): “Just as a script may be enacted in various ways, and just as the play requires both text and interpretation, so the gendered body acts its part in a culturally restricted corporeal space and enacts interpretations within the confines of already existing directives” (906-907).

Thus women perform/ act in the ways that are prescribed by the men in society. They conform to the certain gender requirements that they are expected to perform in Southern Africa. For example, these African women are expected to be submissive even to younger male counterparts. Furthermore, the young men observe the expected behaviour from the older men and then perform the specific requirements of their gender.

The characters of Dikeledi and Elizabeth emphasise the importance of the penis which they view as being a symbol of patriarchal power. Like Dikeledi, Elizabeth also equates the man’s penis with power, as they maintain that it is this physical attribute of men that represents their dominance and elevated status in society.

This flaunting of sexuality is evident when Head states: “He had been standing in front of her, his pants down, flaying his powerful penis in the air and saying: ‘Look, I’m going to show you how I sleep with B’” (13). Head just reiterates here how Elizabeth views the penis as representing patriarchy and the power associated with this.

Consequently, like Dikeledi, Elizabeth also detests the man’s penis; she is convinced that it is the symbol of all evil; this source of pleasure is also men’s icon of power. Elizabeth also believes that men are fully aware of the influence of their penises. Thus they boast about it and show it off, reinforcing their domination over women. One of Dan’s destructive prophecies illustrates how the male characters are almost proud of their penises. “Naked women were prancing wildly in front of her and there was Dan, gyrating his awful penis like mad” (14).

Head depicts the men as predators whose behaviour is so driven by their sexual urges that they even resort to raping young females in order to satisfy and empower themselves. “It was the nightmare of the slums she had grown up in South Africa, but it never dominated her life. Usually small girls got raped, but the men were known” (117). For the characters in Head’s society, rape is quite common and it is portrayed as an inescapable part of life as the sexual superiority of men over women is so engrained in this society that rapists are not adequately dealt with.

This also illustrates the extent to which men use sex as an oppressive tool where male power is relative to the number of women with whom he has been intimate. Dan, a character in Elizabeth’s hallucinations, actually

boasts about the number of women he has bedded: “But he thrust black hands in front of her, black legs and a huge, towering black penis. The penis was always erected. From that night he kept his pants down, after all the women of his harem totalled 71” (128). This reiterates how Dan views the penis as a symbol of power, like a trophy of victory.

An interesting attribute of patriarchy also highlighted by Head is that it is only acceptable if the men in society enjoy and desire sexual pleasure; the males deem it unacceptable if the women desire them in any sexual way. In addition, Head depicts the women characters as a group who do not usually enjoy sexual intercourse as it is only to benefit the men; the needs of the women are usually simply ignored. This is reiterated in Dan’s statement: “My whole body is on fire, he said, then he looked at Elizabeth accusingly and added: It’s you. You are not supposed to think of me with any desire, or else I shall fall down” (126). Here Dan emphasises the perspective that the female characters should not desire the male characters, it is only the male characters that can openly desire the females.

Implicit in this quotation is the assumption that men use sex as a mode of domination. If Elizabeth desires Dan this elevates her to a similar sexual position of power as men. He says that he will fall down if she desires him -he will lose his power over the women as the act of sex is represented by Head to be a tool used for maintaining power. Furthermore, if Dan loses his erection, he too loses his power over women as the penis is viewed as a sign of power and authority.

In order to eradicate both sexual and subjugation problems, the women aim to destroy the symbol of the problem. Like Dikeledi who cut off Garesego's manhood, Elizabeth, in her hallucinations, depicts the death of a man where the focus is also on the penis: "As she closed her eyes all these Coloured men lay down on their backs, their penes in the air, and began to die slowly... Medusa's mocking smile towering over them" (45). Again the disintegration of manhood enables gender roles to be reversed as the symbol of power is destroyed. It is the woman, Medusa, who has supremacy as she stands "towering" over the dying men. She reverses the submissive position to one of dominance and self-determination. Head's classical influence can be seen in her names for characters like 'Medusa' and 'Kenalepe' (Penelope) evoking their ancient Greek archetypes.

Medusa, an evil female representing women that are also capable of seeking sexual and physical power, lives in the mind of Elizabeth and shows no fear of men and their dominance; Medusa views herself as being the person (woman) who is in control. Interestingly, Elizabeth portrays Medusa as an evil woman as she is not accustomed to the idea of women possessing power and using it to their benefit -this is almost an incomprehensible thought to her. The authority of Medusa is further emphasised in Elizabeth's hallucinations: "At some stage Medusa entered. She could hurl a thunderbolt like nothing ever seen before and shatter a victim into a thousand fragments: 'Who's running the show around here? I am'" (43). In this scene in the novel the gender roles have been reversed and instead of the women portrayed as the inferior sex, it is a

woman that has achieved liberation and holds all power and authority.

II

The female characters created by Doris Lessing, although of a different race to those of Head, face the same predicament with regard to the men in their society. Lessing reinforces this dilemma in the quote made by Mary in the novel, *The Grass is Singing*: “He’s a man, isn’t he? He can do as he likes” (41). This stance taken by Mary Turner mirrors the mindset of the subjugated women in the selected texts by Head. While Head portrays societies riddled with the oppression of her African women; likewise, Lessing, a white author, paints a comparable picture of the gender oppression experienced by the white women in society. Like the female characters in Head’s texts, the female characters in Lessing’s fiction are also expected to live according to specific societal expectations and roles. In addition, like the women of colour who suffer emotional distress, the oppression faced by the white female women also negatively affects their emotional well being.

Ian Lopez’s theory concerning group conflict in his discussion of racism seems appropriate in our analysis of gender differences and inequality in *The Grass is Singing*. The findings of his studies concerning racism can also be used to examine the possible causes of female oppression in Southern Africa. Lopez argues that the data compiled by various scientists demonstrates that intra-group differences exceed inter-group differences as greater genetic variation exists within populations than

between populations (967). Therefore one should notice more conflict between members of the same hegemonic group than between members of different hegemonic groups. It is probably why in *The Grass is Singing* there is conflict between the white male and female characters based on the competition between the two groups and their differing beliefs pertaining to patriarchy and the unfair treatment of the female characters.

Lessing's Mary is in the identical situation to the women portrayed in Head's texts. The expected stereotype of white women portrayed in Mary's society leads her into a loveless, unwanted marriage. Mary's reflection on her life before marriage is a life free of worries and filled with extreme happiness. However, it is after her marriage to Dick that she experiences a complete personality change, leading to her dysfunctional behaviour after marriage. Her carefree existence as an unmarried woman in an African environment is reinforced in her statement: "South Africa is a wonderful place for the unmarried white woman" (44). Thus while conforming to the expectations of society and marrying Dick, Mary feels as if she is changing her identity. Her identity has now changed to that of a married woman governed by the duties of a wife.

Irigaray identifies three main categories of women important in the analysis of Mary's situation. The mother figure, the virginal woman and the prostitute are imperative to the study of female subjectivity (808). It is important to note that all women in society had to fall into one of the above mentioned categories as these are the only three categories into which a woman is placed by the men in society. The category into which a woman

is placed also determines her significance and worth to the men in that particular society. From these categories it is evident that remaining single is not an acceptable status for a woman in the society Mary lives, thus it is expected that she ought to get married and ultimately become the mother figure. It also illustrates Butler's argument of gender as performative:

Gender is instituted through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as a mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements and enactments of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self. This formulation moves the conception of gender off the ground of a substantial model of identity to one that requires a conception of a constituted *social temporality*. (900-901)

With gender regulated and policed by rigid social norms and constituted by social practices, Mary's attitude with regard to marriage is subsequently affected and guided by the social norms and practices of the time, where women ought to get married and eventually be placed in the category of mother.

Mary is "forced" into marriage in the plot of the novel as white women are conditioned to believe that they should get married. If a woman chooses not to follow this particular gender expectation, she is ridiculed and scorned by the other people. Mary's predicament concerning marriage and the single life is reiterated when she says: "It was during these two hours of half-consciousness that she allowed herself to dream about the beautiful lost time when she worked in an office and

lived as she pleased, before people made her get married” (118). This quote also emphasises the constraints placed on females and the negative impact of these restrictions on their emotional well being.

Like women of colour, white women also lose their independence when married. This point is clearly illustrated in the behaviour of Mary who conforms to societal expectations and gets married. With Dick Turner, a husband genuinely concerned about her well being, Mary nevertheless loses her independence and zest for life. As a married woman, Mary is now expected to perform certain responsibilities and household tasks. Instead of working and having a measure of autonomy and independence, she is now expected to bear and raise Dick’s children and to be a housewife maintaining and running the household. The required expectations of Mary as a woman are shown in the quote: “He knew perfectly well what he wanted: a pleasant companion, a mother for his children and someone to run his house for him” (50).

A theme prevalent in both authors’ texts is female hatred and detestation of sex. Like Dikeledi and Elizabeth who view sex as an oppressive tool, Mary appears to loathe sex too. As a child she had witnessed her father’s chauvinist behaviour towards her mother, allowing her to reach these conclusions about sex and her view of it as being of no benefit to women. This is evident in Lessing’s description of Mary’s attitude towards children: “Mary liked other people’s children but shuddered at the thought of her own. She felt sentimental at weddings, but she had a profound distaste for sex; there had been little privacy in her home and there were

things she did not care to remember, she had taken good care to forget them years ago” (46).

Mary’s father is one who portrays the typical behaviour of chauvinist white males. He has identical opinion and beliefs regarding women with the men in Head’s texts. He can be likened to Garesego as he too expects Mary’s mother to raise the children with very little money. Instead of using his money for the household, he would spend it on himself and his drinking habits. Mary’s account of her mother’s frustrating financial situation reflects the mirrored attitude of Garesego: “Am I expected to bring up three children on the money that is left over when he chooses to come home. And then she would stand still, waiting for condolences of the man who pocketed the money which was rightly hers to spend for the children” (38).

This further confirms how both whites and men of colour are not supportive of their wives, and more importantly, their children. Like Garesego who abandons his family, Mary’s father also turns his back on his, providing them with little or minimal financial and emotional support. Thus, it is not just women of colour that are deeply affected by gender oppression; white women are in similar predicament.

For Lionnet “Women writers are often especially aware of their task as producers of images that both participate in the dominant representations of their culture and simultaneously undermine and subvert those images by offering a re-vision of familiar scripts” (205). In reading works by Doris Lessing and Bessie Head, the reader is confronted with the struggles that these writers experience as female authors of different race groups

living in a conflicted African environment. A scrutiny of these texts allows us to learn the lives lived by these authors and the significant impact their experiences have on their writings. Furthermore, one can actually observe the extent to which society affects writers and impact on their creations. Our engagement with the Lessing and Head texts also adds to the issues prevalent in gender oppression and increases our understanding and knowledge of their societies. Thus we may deduce that Southern Africa, a patriarchal society, suppressed the women of the continent irrespective of their race or ethnicity. In other words, white women traditionally deemed more privileged equally experienced with their black counterparts the drastic and ultimately tragic consequences of human subjugation.

Chapter 7

Ambanasom, like Shakespeare

Denis, T

I

MODERN African literature, considered an offshoot of her oral traditions, culture and values, and with strong elements of foreign tutelage, has served as “instrument of protest against colonial exploitation and cultural domination” (Nkengasong 1). It seeks to cross the limits of language and nationhood, exploring the rich cultures and traditions that the colonial presence had deigned to eclipse, grappling with questions, issues and perspectives on black identities in order to elevate value and serve the purpose of entertaining and enlightening humanity.

Despite what Eckhard Bretinger describes as “the never-ending debate on the language issue” (1), a good many contemporary African writers have begun to realise that Western cultural influences no matter how dominant could never, after all, eclipse African values. For instance, Babacar M’Baye argues for African modernity, dismissing Paul Gilroy’s definition of modernity as

“simply a Western concept as if Africans and other Blacks from the non-Western hemisphere had not produced valuable cultures and identity formations that fit popular notions of the modern” (190). Earlier on Ngugi wa Thiong’o had warned that cultural imperialism “in the era of neo-colonialism can be a more dangerous cancer because it can take new subtle forms” (18). In M’Baye’s opinion, Gilroy’s exclusion of the role that African intellectuals played in nationalism and resistance movements that Gilroy found to be central in the history of Black Atlantic and Black modernity is myopic as it does not give a true or honest picture of the African situation. Here, Mbaye is in consonance with Frantz Fanon who had noted that “native intellectuals are no luxury but a necessity in any coherent programme” to destabilise colonialist notions of nativity as a fall back into “barbarism, degradation and bestiality” (371).

Scholars, nevertheless, believe Africa must come of age and enter the golden phase where her writers desist from licking the colonial sore and take the responsibility of advancing their own civilization. Chinua Achebe admonishes that “the time has come when we must assume responsibility for our problems and our situation in the world and resist the temptation to blame other people” (378). Indeed, the notion of equal and respectful human and cultural relations is found in Achebe’s statement that “whatever colonialism may have done in the past, the very fact of a commonwealth conference...is sufficient repudiation of it, is indeed a symbol of a new relationship of equality between peoples who were once masters and servants” (378). Human history may only be distorted but the genetics are never extinguished. And so

the thinking is entirely plausible that African culture from which African literature is sprung would stand its ground and survive the fleeting rise and fall of empires. After all, the African American tradition would not exist today if it were just so easy to completely cut off a people from their roots.

As a consequence, the positive values of African art are paramount to some new generation of African writers. Chin Ce is optimistic about “a few who have preferred that we chart an alternate, clearer vision for African writing...which requires that one must needs recover some flickering remnants of arcane light (ancestral wisdom) for a further enlightened posterity” (12). Gladly, this direction in African writing is observable in many recent works from Nigeria, South Africa and Cameroon.¹

II

Comparative artistic and philosophical ideas between Western and African texts bring new perspectives to the study of recent African writing. In *A Son of the Native Soil*, the Anglophone Cameroon writer, Shadrack Ambanasom, projects a Shakespearean tragedy against traditional African background. Set in the North West Region of Cameroon, the tragic scene and the fate of the protagonist are artistically woven to reflect Aristotelian tragedy and the tragic hero. Ambansom's craft is evident in the way he endows his hero with qualities that propel him higher than others in the community of Dudum. The novelist treads upon the bounds of nature and passion and endows on Achamba, the hero of the story, an

outstanding personality which foreshadows the tragic atmosphere that leads the protagonist to his treacherous murder at the height of his fame. He lets the society catapult Achamba onto the height of his glory only to “betray him in deeper consequence” (Colin 2).

There are strong indicators from Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* on the tragic events that surround the tragic hero in Amabansom’s *Son of the Native Soil*. Regarding *Macbeth*, Alexandre-Marie Colin observes:

Macbeth is from a tragic standpoint the most sublime and the most impressive as an acting play. Nothing so terrible has been written since the Eumenides of Aeschylus, and nothing in dramatic literature - not even the slaying of Agamemnon - is depicted with such awesome intensity as the murder of Duncan. (Par 1)

Therefore, reading Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* side by side Amabanasom’s *Son of the Native Soil* might seem like an examination of two literary cultures. William Hazlitt comments that *Macbeth* has “the force of things upon the mind. What he represents is brought home to the bosom as a part of our experience, implanted in the memory as if we had known the places, persons, and things of which he treats” (Par. 2). In the same manner, an African reader would identify with the local taste and colour of *Son of the Native Soil*. The squirrel hunt episode, long standing land disputes, local politics and tussles, or this typical setting in Akaya’s homestead are a relevant instance:

Patches of light filtered through cracks in the wall and little opening on the door and windows...A pig was grunting in its sty, while in their pen, goats bleated. Cocks crowed repeatedly; dogs barked, and birds warbled in joy. In the midst of this animal chorus could be heard voices of early risers, especially raffia-wine tapers. (13)

It will be necessary to consider, briefly, some of the principles of a tragic hero as outlined by Aristotle and exemplified in Shakespeare's tragedies. Arguably Shakespeare's notion of the tragic hero strays slightly from Aristotle's. Some scholars even hold the view that there is absolutely no connection between Shakespeare's and Aristotle's concepts of the tragic flaw. As Hammersmith states, "students still bring with them the conviction that Shakespearean tragic character is grounded firmly and eternally in the pseudo-Aristotelian concept of the 'tragic flaw.' This is such an odd mistake, and such a pervasive one" (245). Hammersmith further notes that "Aristotle's *Poetics* affected Elizabethan and Jacobean England scarcely at all" (245). However, the relationship between Aristotle's *Poetics* and Shakespeare's idea of the tragic hero cannot be completely discarded as such a connection exists. Other critics think that "Shakespeare probably did not know Greek tragedy directly, [and that] ...Senecan and Renaissance tragedy were influenced by the theory of tragedy found in Aristotle's *Poetics*" (Schwartz 1).

The difference, nevertheless, between Aristotle's and Shakespeare's ideas lies in the fact that Aristotle holds that a tragic hero must be consistently 'good' without any trace of villainy in his character while Shakespeare does

not see in those lines. Aristotle, for example, would not consider Macbeth a tragic hero because he is inherently evil, and so deserves his punishment or tragic fall. In other words, his fall cannot genuinely attract sympathy from the audience because of his wicked act of killing Duncan. This, notwithstanding renaissance principles of tragedy, remains fundamentally the same as stated in *Poetics*. Aristotle explains that a tragic hero must be a character of great and noble status, “not like us”. The hero must occupy a ‘high’ position in the society, coupled with nobility and virtue as part of his innate character. He holds that the tragic hero, although great, is far from being perfect. The hero should reflect reality: “make them like the reality” (15). The realistic nature of the hero enables ordinary persons to identify with him when he eventually falls. Aristotle talks of “a good element of character, and that the character should be “consistent and the same throughout” (15). The hero should inherently possess a weakness that triggers or contributes to his downfall. The weakness should either be an error of judgment or some character flaw (hamartia) or hubris in the case of Shakespearean tragedy (which is a sort of arrogant pride or over-confidence). Aristotle argues that the hero's misfortune or fate is not usually totally deserved, and the accompanying punishment usually exceeds the crime. The tragic fall should be followed by some awareness or self-knowledge and discovery on the part of the hero.

In *Son of the Nativie Soil*, Achamba, like Okonkwo in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, is not of noble birth. He is described as the son of Embuta, a one legged Akan man

barely existing, without any illusions of greatness or wealth. Shakespeare would not consider Achamba's birth noble. Notwithstanding his low birth, Achamba's 'maker' wrought in him admirable and outstanding traits that erased the ordinariness of his humble background. Described in delicate expressions as 'a young man of about thirty,' 'tall,' 'slender' and 'handsome,' Achamba is said to have 'chocolate coloured complexion,' coupled with thick hair, gave him the most admired and envied 'afro' during his university days. However, that was in the past. At present, he is a "dashing gentleman with a certain romantic air around him...always smartly dressed" (50). Achamba is one of the patrons of the Dudum Parents'/Teachers' Association. He would appear during important events in stylish dark suit, a sky blue shirt and a black tie. He has a wardrobe that contains 'well-tailored suits for special occasions.' Achamba's elegant appearance and eloquent speech at the Parents/Teachers Movement attract ceaseless applause from the expectant population, and raise him literally above ordinary human. His degree from the University of Yaounde does not only place him on the highest rung of academic ladder but fetches him the job of a secondary school teacher, a prestigious position which gives him an imposing and conspicuous social status in the whole of Dudum. He is a man of the people naturally fit to occupy any post that demands popularity. One of his kinsmen suggests, "let us make Achamba not only President of this meeting but also President of the New Dudum Cultural and Development Association, which henceforth will embrace all of us here today, all Dudum people wherever they may be in Cameroon" (165). Achamba wins the

confidence of his people and becomes the President of the Dudum Cultural and Development Association by Acclamation.

There was none to rival him in Dudum, for he had scored a series of firsts: he was the first President of the DCDA, first potential sub-section elections candidate from the new Dudum constituency, first university graduate from Dudum, and the lucky husband of the first Dudum girl to have graduated from college. Achamba's fame thus soared. (173)

By every consideration, Achamba meets the high social status requirements of a tragic hero. He is conscious of his fame and is self confident like Yoyo, in Ce's *Children of Koloko*, who tells himself: "After all my CV was quite impressive. I had finished college, done a stint of press work, joined the national defence academy..." (169). Aristotle holds that a tragic hero must be 'good.' What qualifies a character as good would require putting together a number of character traits that describe him as such. Achamba's goodness is qualified with expressions such as peaceful, honest, and kind. As a peace maker, he puts in the last iota of his energy to bring together all progressive Dudum people for the sake of peace and development. This effort only adds to his most remarkable achievement of reconciling the chiefs of Akan and Anjong whose relationship had deteriorated beyond mending. Even the chieftaincy crisis, which had become an incurable sore in Dudum, could be resolved, thanks to Achamba's research efforts on the issue in the National Archives in Yaounde. His reconciliation

initiatives also bring on board the main opposing political figures from the two villages. He takes advantage of the visit of the D.O. to assemble both parties at Anjong School to draft a welcome address. Achamba's desire to achieve peace in Dudum seems to transcend personal interests and emotions. For instance, he is ready to employ his marriage for the Akan/ Anjong peace process when he remarks to his fiancé, "I'm conscious of the fact that our two villages are larger units than two simple families; otherwise don't you see the beauty of our marrying to heal the wounds of the quarrelling villages?" (149). Achamba's goodness is explained in terms of his kindness to his people. He helps his kinsmen materially; participates in the construction of roads; advises people and the Chiefs on issues of development; educates the youths on issues relating to obedience and hard work; pays regular visits and gives money to fellow villagers in detention at Mbambe, a gesture no other person initiates.

Since honesty is rare among political figures, especially to those who understand that politics is a game of self interest, Achamba's honesty in handling the Akan/ Anjong conflict, particularly on the question of which village should be chosen as the capital of Dudum, inscribes him in bold letters as a benevolent character. He disagrees with Abaago on the subject because he "would not selfishly advocate Akan as the headquarters of Dudum" (126). The disagreement further deepens because Achamba would not go in for anything that stands "in complete defiance of the facts of nature and history" (127). His search for facts in the National Archives is, firstly, an inept proof of honesty and, secondly, a means of obtaining lasting peace. It takes

more than ordinary honesty to resist the sugared tongue and threats of a political fox like Abaago, and, most of all, pass verdict against one's village of origin. Achamba's immeasurable degree of honesty is his 'harmatia' because his murderers get offended by this uprightness and plan to eliminate him in the cruellest manner.

Regarding tragic flaw, Hammersmith asserts that "Macbeth's 'tragic flaw' is his ambition ...Othello's is his credulity (or his jealousy), ...Hamlet's is his inclination to think too much ...Lear's is his pride" (246). For Achamba, it is his extreme honesty. He blindly depends on his conscience and this leads him to the fatal error of misjudgement. He does not only fail to realise that his enemies cannot read the content of his mind on his face, but fails to understand that his enemies, unlike he, have no conscience at all. Achamba does not die of carelessness as his father had feared. He sufficiently keeps away from his enemies, especially Abaago, thereby avoiding any possibility of poisoning. That is why his assassins could only succeed to kill him in his own house. Achamba's death could have been avoided if he had heeded his wife's advice not to visit Akan or remain in Mbambe on the advice of his father, Embuta. Achamba's lack of judgment on what his enemies are capable of is so severe that even his education and experience could not help him make a leap over this tragic weakness. He falls prey to the 'semi-educated' treacherous character Abaago, whose name and character echo Shakespeare's Iago. Abaago's intrigues and political manoeuvres are also similar to those of Fathead in Ce's *Children of Koloko*. Like Abaago, Fathead makes

villagers believe in him even when everything he does is in his own interest. These two local politicians in their different contexts represent the modern African politicians.

The trial instigated by Abaago before the village council marks the beginning of the serious plot against Achamba's life. Abaago tells the village council that "Achamba, like the ungrateful child in the fable, has bitten the finger that fed him and also stabbed in the back his foster mother to whom he owes his very existence" (152). Achamba's defence in the claim, "My best defence in this charge is my conscience" (153), does not convince his judges. Even the findings from the National Archives do not help much because the trial is based more on emotions than reason. Achamba's tragic flaw eclipses the council's evil intentions against him. His thought that "it was a matter of time... for those charges to be quietly dropped" (155) does not come true as his enemies seek his death later. It is understood that a man cannot win a judgment against his clan or people.

Supernatural or unnatural happenings in both *Macbeth* and *Son of the Native Soil* tie with the belief patterns of the two societies where the stories are set. Belief, according to Jacob Meskin, "is in a truth that exceeds conventional categories" (38). The belief in the divinity of kings and the 'Great Chain of Being' in Shakespeare's days are closely related to the belief in the gods-ordained chieftaincy in Dudum. Most African societies believe that chiefs are ordained by the gods in the spirit realm and they reincarnate after death. This explains why kingship or chieftaincy remains sacred and cannot be elected, bought or sold. Generally, the dead do not depart; they

hover around to watch over their relations and property. What takes place in the physical has an impact in the spiritual. The unnatural overthrow of Duncan by Macbeth through heinous means upsets the natural 'chain of being' and the royal lineage. The consequences are felt in the spiritual and physical realms. Physically, nature is disturbed and thrown into turmoil. The appearance of the witches at the beginning with the declaration, "fair is foul and foul is fair" (I.i.10) signals a world upside down, the reversal of the natural order. The thunder and lightning which crash above a Scottish moor do not only announce the appearance of the witches but also symbolise confusion that envelopes the whole atmosphere. "It further shows the use of inversions and paradoxes in nature that Shakespeare eventually uses throughout the play" (Contrasts 1).

The disorders in the natural realm experienced in the night preceding Achamba's murder reflect those in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. The night before Achamba's assassination is memorable as the most destructive night in history, a villager observes:

It was as if the den of the wild and undomesticated elements had been thrown open and the chained forces let loose. The furious rain, the violent storm, the angry thunder, and the intermittent lightning -all of these- joined in their elemental rage to make of that night one of the most terrifying in the history of the clan. (185)

The supernatural events are symbolic in the two texts in the way they uniquely announce or foretell the disappearance of great personalities from the scene. The

supernatural amplifies the theme of death. A Dudum man remarks: "Remember, we are told, a similar catastrophe occurred prior to the death of the greatest Chief Dudum has ever had, Ambikoh, the great grandson of Ngiekum" (188). This happened so many years ago and nobody in the present generation witnessed the event. The Old Man's memories go back seventy years, but nothing he can remember compares what has happened during this night. Ambanasom's work imitates the old man in *Macbeth* who recounts his experience of the night of Duncan's death, "I have seen /Hours dreadful and things strange; but this sore night /Hath trifled former knowings" (II.iv.2-4).

The incident that precedes Achamba's death can only be associated with the departure of great figures in the likes of Ambikoh. It equates Achamba with Ambikoh, the greatest Chief Dudum has ever had. It is interesting to note that similar visions and hallucinations are seen in the nights that precede the tragedy in both texts. Visions and hallucinations are recurrent in *Macbeth* and serve as reminders of Macbeth's and Lady Macbeth's joint culpability for the growing body count. When he is about to kill Duncan, Macbeth sees a dagger floating in the air, covered with blood and pointed toward the king's chamber: "Is this a Dagger, which I see before me, /The Handle toward my Hand? Come, let me clutch thee:" (II.I 32). The dagger represents the bloody course on which Macbeth is about to embark. Later, he sees Banquo's ghost sitting in a chair at a feast, pricking his conscience by mutely reminding him that he murdered his former friend.

In like manner, two days before Achamba's murder, Embuta has a dream which foretells the calamity that is going to befall his son, though unknown to him, keeps Embuta worried. "Two days ago I had a very disturbing dream, a dream in which I wept...That dream is portentous. ...my father was killed on a battle field at Edom" (182). The dream evidently ties with Achamba's death, because the dreamer is all worried the more when he sees Achamba. "It is ominous. That is why I was worried when I saw you" (182). Achamba himself experiences a scenario of his own eventual death, which is evocative of the hallucinations in *Macbeth*.

As he lay shivering under the blanket he was convinced he heard, in the midst of the savage sounds outside, people crying or dancing; he thought he heard people screaming for help; he thought he heard women and children wailing; he thought he heard the notes of the ndek beating a mournful funeral message; he thought he heard Echunjei, heavy with pregnancy and drenched to the bones, beating frantically at his door for him to open and let her in ...This was unbearable. (186)

Achamba's vision in this passage is a premonition of his own murder and funeral ceremony to occur shortly after this experience. The passage reminds one of the phantom voices Macbeth hears after murdering Duncan. He thought he heard a voice say "Sleep no more! /'Macbeth does murder sleep,' the innocent sleep... Glamis hath murder'd sleep, and therefore Cawdor/ Shall sleep no more, Macbeth shall sleep no more!" (II.ii.42-44). The difference is that this voice is heard after the

execution of Duncan, while Achamba hears voices before he is assassinated.

The unnatural in *Son of the Native Soil* is evident in the sacred tree around Dudum Falls which lies buried in a landslide. "It was supernatural; it was the work of the gods or the ancestors...This portends something terrible for Dudum" (189). Indeed it is a bad omen. Also, the inexplicable feelings that Echunjei has about Achamba's homecoming ties with the 'bad predictions' suggested by the traditional casting of kola by Achamba and friends in the market. The cast of the kola predicts some kind of evil that looms in the air but which no one knows exactly what it holds for the future. This recalls Banquo's experience before Macbeth murders Duncan where he remarks to his son, "A heavy summons lies like lead upon me, /And yet I would not sleep: merciful powers, /Restrain in me the cursed thoughts that nature /Gives way to in repose!" (II.i.6-9). Just like Achamba's friends in the market, or Echunjei who feels disturbed about the unknown that hangs in the air, Banquo doesn't say just what thoughts are disturbing his sleep. Finally, the bloody scene where Achamba is seen lying in the pool of his blood in his house is reminiscent of Duncan's bloody murder in his castle. The tragedy in both cases takes place in the night and is only discovered the following morning.

However closely related in the circumstances surrounding Ambanasom's and Shakespeare's tragic heroes, Achamba as a character is still different from Duncan or Macbeth. Duncan, a graceful king, commanding a kingdom is surrounded by an atmosphere

different from Achamba's. Duncan's gorgeous castle, horses and guards create solemnity that is different from Embuta's humble hut. Besides, "a monstrous crime is committed; Duncan, a venerable old man, and the best of kings, is in defenceless sleep, murdered by his subject, whom he has loaded with honours and rewards" (Colin 4). Furthermore, Macbeth's military prowess, courage and bravery, tested and proven in battle constitute significant distinctions between him and Achamba. Their disparity in terms of 'harmatia' or tragic flaw is worth mentioning. It is vaulting ambition that lurks in Macbeth and pushes him to a series of murders and consequently to his tragic end. Meanwhile, it is Achamba's blind honesty that exposes him to charges of treason before the village council. Perhaps, Achamba's fate is in keeping with the traditional African adage that 'no one wrestles with the gods and goes away without a broken arm.'

Chapter 8

Morrison and wa Thiong'o

Omuteche, J

I

IN their prose works Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Toni Morrison employ traditional folklore as means of re-imaging individual and community history, and identity. Folkloric devices are dialogically blended with varied creative strategies leading to what may be termed radical narratives which help to deconstruct the denigrating images of the (formerly) enslaved or colonised. Thus fiction becomes a means of decolonisation or self re-assertion within the paradox of freedom and non-freedom, or being and non-belonging that characterise contemporary postcolonial realities.

Centuries of colonialism and slavery had led to complex and long term cultural disruptions, homelessness in space-places and sense of non-belonging for the colonised and enslaved. Colonisation and enslavement involved deliberate overt and covert efforts to degrade the humanity and cultures of the colonised and

enslaved. To maintain colonialism and the economic advantage it sought to generate, European colonisers and settlers evolved elaborate systems of racialism based on Eurocentric notions of inferiority-superiority and human-nonhuman binaries thereby perpetuating power relations that have had long term impacts on the sense of identity and belonging of the colonised and enslaved societies.

European imperialism, as manifested in colonialism and slavery, involved spatially widespread criminal acts that constituted extensive range of genocide and human violations over an extended time span. As Marcus Wood argues, the “multiple acts of abduction” where “the blacks become prey and the white a proud conqueror seeking spoils of war that he will transform into profitable commodities” (2) were both (in)human and economic crimes. Ronald Segal rightly considers the transatlantic slave trade as one of the known holocaust of human history (36). On the African continent, the years of slave raiding and colonisation tore apart families, communities, and kingdoms. Political, economic, and cultural processes that had been developing for generations were shattered. Toni Morrison in her novels *A Mercy* and *Beloved* tries to reconstruct the alienating experiences of the Middle Passage and on the slave plantation.

In *Something Torn and New*, Ngugi wa Thiong'o argues that colonialism was a dismemberment of different kinds. There was the physical dismemberment of the bodies of those conquered in the war of occupation. This involved the decapitation of body parts and desecration of African sacred places and bodies of Africans captured in the battle fields (5). On another

level, the dismemberment involved the separation of the colonised from their “sovereign being” as the colonial subjects’ memory was torn from their individual and collective community body (6). Franz Fanon had shown that these processes of psychological oppression were the precursor of effective cultural and physical domination of Africa by Europeans (28).

During this process, Eurocentric narratives that constructed stereotypical and prejudice-laden myths of inferiority, sub-humanity, savagery and anarchy associated with Africa and Africans versus a romanticised self-image of Europeans as saviours, noble, courageous, pious, and civilised were characteristically churned out. Pieterse argues that prejudice and negative constructions of others in western cultures are evident in the construction of western identities upon the negative identity of others with complex interplay of motives ranging from economic, political, cultural, emotional, and psychological interests (9-10). The resulting images, as social constructions and representations emanating from a multiplicity of historical contexts and configurations, perform key roles in the communication, instruction, and general transmission of privileged western culture of domination as they situate and continue to position the *other* into roles of subordination.

Identity, Belonging and the Oral Tradition

Faced with European challenges to their identity and belonging arising out of the acts and processes of imperialism, Africans were obligated to ensure the survival and continuity of their culture. For African

Americans this involved a number of strategies to defend the 'I am' against the onslaught of definitions the 'master' imposed upon the 'black other,' and also memorialize the transatlantic passage in African American cultural memory from generation to generation (Diedrich *et al* 17-18). Orature, usually associated with the spoken and sung imaginative traditions, became an important aspect of cultural preservation and reconstitution. Jan Vansina argues that forms of verbal art like song, oral poetry, sayings, proverbs, and tales are metaphorical. Because of this quality, they express "the experience of contemporary situations or events" or the "intense emotions associated with them" (11). Here African art, in their oral and written forms, played a major role. Like their counterparts in oral art, Morrison and Ngugi draw upon ancestral history and folkloric traditions to texture their works. They feel obliged to seek and re-envision the ethos that sustained the past even if this past has been distorted or erased. This visionary reconstruction of the past for social redirection is a quest that folkloric aesthetics achieve.

For instance, song plays an important role in Morrison's writing and underscores its importance in expressing a people's lived and deeply felt experiences. In *Beloved*, Sixo sings to express to his tormenters the deep feelings of hatred he harbours for the slave institution and his determination to take no more. His song expresses his choice to fight his oppressors and die rather than be captured and taken back to slavery. He also celebrates his posterity and hope for their freedom in the same song- 'Seven-O!' - naming the foetus in the womb of Patsy, the Thirty-Mile Woman. Sixo further sings the

song in his African language, reiterating its revolutionary intention. As Paul D notes, though he did not understand the words of the song, “he understood the sound: hatred so loose it was juba” (269).

Songs are characterised with immediacy, suitable for expressing and recording the unfolding history as it is lived. And so, Paul D’s songs in Georgia “were flat-headed nails for pounding and pounding and pounding” (48). The chained men sang as they worked with their sledge hammers and in their songs they relieved their lives and expressed revolt against its oppression: “[through the songs] they killed a boss so often and so completely they had to bring him back to life to pulp him one more time” (128). African American folklore during slavery included a variety of songs, developed in an environment highly influenced by the conditions of their enslavement, their African mores and artistic expressions, and their interaction with other cultures in America such as European and indigenous Americans. Underlying the songs’ themes and rhythm was the tension between bondage and aspiration for freedom (Hughes and Bontemps xiv).

Song is also central in constructing, preserving and transmitting legend in Morrison’s *Song of Solomon*. The centrality of the song is captured in Morrison’s naming the novel after it. Within the song resides the history of a family and pride and identity of a community. It celebrates the longing for liberty and the heroism of one man who willed and attained the feat of returning *home*. Without specifically knowing its origin and context, Pilate sings the song along with other songs that she uses for entertainment, to treasure, and transmit cultural

knowledge to her children and those around her. Transmitted orally and their content being flexible, songs can be adapted to new functions as context and social needs demand. That was why, while watching the children play song in Shalimar, Milkman realises they are singing the same song he had heard Pilate sing numerous times, “O Sugarman don’t leave me here.” But in Shalimar the children are saying “Solomon don’t leave me here” (300). Interestingly, when Milkman takes note of the song and realises it has a message for him, he checks for a pen and paper to make notes but finds he hasn’t got any, so he had to memorise the song as the children perform (303). And it is the story of his great-grandparents and grandfather that the song relays to him: In his flight back *home* Solomon dropped Jake, his son, near a white man’s house, he is picked by Heddy and taken to red man’s house; the flight drives Ryna into fits of inconsolable wailing, lamenting the desertion with twenty-one children and chains of slavery (304).

Flying, a metaphor of freedom, is the central image of the song. When Milkman is able to unravel the song, he clarifies his family’s identity and history. This is very significant for the assertion of identity and home. The atmosphere and images in the song resonate with the complex history of African American history, espousing the deeply felt search for home and identity. In its total performance and it is dramatised by the children, the song memorialises graphically the history of pursuit of freedom, longing for home, and the trauma of deracination and family separation.

On Ngugi’s part, song is used to communicate revolutionary message. In *Devil on the Cross*, Gatuiria

wishes to compose a song that will encompass the common historical experiences of Kenya in its diversity and artistic vision of remembrance and aspiration (232-3). Muturi and Wangari are the characters most associated with song as a means of expressing social discontent and re-inventing the heroic age of freedom struggle. In *Petals of Blood*, besides being source of popular entertainment and religious indoctrination, songs memorialise the experiences of colonialism, the freedom struggle, and comment on the contemporary experiences of the community. As such, they serve as reservoir of the history, especially the history which neo-colonial status quo seeks to silence.

Natural calamities and colonial subjugation play a major role in making Ilmorog a desolate place and displacing its population. One such famine that followed one of Europe's World Wars to which the people of Ilmorog were forcefully conscripted is memorialised in the song about 'the famine of cassava.' The song links the effects of the war with the devastations of the famine. The cassava flour that becomes the only available food during the famine is figuratively referred to as 'a stillborn child' in the song (111). Songs are also important because they reconstruct and preserve the legendary history of the community of Ilmorog (111, 121). In them is encapsulated the memory of the origins of their problems, creating critical awareness in the face of post-independent amnesia and dearth of revolutionary spirit.

Songs, in other cases, are used to rally a community to challenge the powers that marginalise and sustain their chronic poverty. During the epic trek to city, the people of Ilmorog sing songs that underscore the state of the

postcolonial Kenya characterised by neo-colonialism, inequality, hypocrisy, and nepotism (135). To Abdulla, these songs (136, 142, 252) recall the songs the Mau Mau fighters sang in the forest for inspiration, expressing their aspirations of victory in the face the brunt of the British colonial military might. The songs too maintain the culture that holds and sustains the community in times of postcolonial alienation. They help in the renewal and re-connection to the community of those who feel most uprooted like Wanja, Munira, and Karega when they get involved in the dances and singing. The lead performers who are closely connected to the lore, Nyakinyua, Njuguna, and Abudulla, help re-initiate the alienated members who are out of touch with cultural mores (207-9). Furthermore, more songs keep on being composed to comment on and interpret what the community is experiencing (264-5).

Ngugi's *Devil on the Cross*, *Petals of Blood* and *Matigari* are attempts to incorporate the verbal art in literary content and form. These features of oral traditions correlate with Morrison's in *Beloved*, *Sula*, and *Song of Solomon*. Generally they contribute to a folkloric tradition that is covertly subversive and intrinsically regenerative. Illustrative scenes in Ngugi that bring to mind this atmosphere is Nyakinyua's reminiscences at the Theng'eta drinking episode (212) revealed through settings that evoke traditional story telling sessions. The setting and the atmosphere help the listeners to open up, re-live and re-tell their own stories, hence confronting their subconscious traumas (214-226). *Matigari*'s message is spread in a folkloric mode that subverts the heavily policed modern state characterised by censorship

of alternative voice apart from the state's own mouthpiece. The story of Matigari evolve and acquire legendary and even mystical proposition as is transformed in the repeated telling and transmission that is verbal:

He went to the crossroads. Women returning from the river would put down their cans, pots and barrels so as to exchange stories about Matigari.

‘He is actually a tiny, ordinary-looking man.’

[....]

‘Did you say tiny? The man is a giant. He could easily touch the sky.’ (75-6)

In *Weep, Not Child*, the information about the colonial conquest and loss of indigenous land to the settlers is transmitted during story telling sessions. Ngũtho's stories also tell of recent experiences (colonial land alienation) that impact on the sense of home and identity in the young generation (24-27). In *Devil on the Cross*, the story of Wariinga is generally told by an expert traditional performer, a Gicaandi player. Wariinga's story becomes a popular lore, not only entertaining, but also inspiring a revolutionary spirit around the country. Further, Ngugi imbues the oral artist with authority, as “a prophet of justice” in a post-independence, where repression, censorship, and oppression characterise the socio-cultural landscape (1-2).

Morrison's *Song of Solomon* associates Pilate mostly with the African American folkloric heritage. Her stories and songs are important in Milkman's identity regeneration. Her household is characterised with an

Africanist feel that re-asserts African American rootedness in community and ancestral history. This is well captured in the scene when her brother Macon Dead standing outside in the night witnesses the domestic setting of Pilate's household. The members of the household, Pilate, Reba, and Hagar, are happily singing in unison as they carry out their evening chores (28-30). Macon Dead realises how Pilate's domestic atmosphere contrasts with his own. He has to struggle to overcome the strong psychological pull the episode has on him as he resists the realisation that what is unfolding before him is part of his ancestry, communality and lore, which he nevertheless chooses to sacrifice to ascend to Anglo-American dominated middle class status. A folkloric mood permeates Baby Suggs' preaching on Sundays in the mysterious clearing (103). The preaching is in form of communal call and response performance, seeking to remember torments of slavery and re-imagine a new self, claiming an assertive future.

Another aspect of reliance on oral features for subversive and regenerative purposes that cut-across the works of Ngugi and Morrison is use of myths. Oral traditions include myths of creation, deliverance, fertility, and the hero. In their works, writers sometimes rely on such myths or fashion their own literary myths. Lawrence Coupe says that the mythic is an important aspect of cultural and literary experience, thus "literary works may be regarded as 'mythopoeic', tending to create or recreate certain narratives which human beings take to be crucial to their understanding of their world" (4). Alan Watts posits that myths do not mean 'untrue' or 'unhistorical.' But rather, myths are "a complex of stories -some no

doubt fact, and some fantasy in which, for various reasons, human beings regard as demonstrations of the inner meaning of the universe and of human life” (7). Therefore, “to study a culture’s myths is to gleam information about that culture -about its inner identity, hidden beneath the mask of its everyday concerns” (Leeming 6).

Mythical figures possess spiritual and physical superiority infused with history. The grandeur of their representation deconstruct the imperial discourses that depicted the colonised as inferior. Psychologically, these reassert pride and dignity that was distorted or elided, providing the contemporary generations with positive images, which help them, conceive a more viable future. As such, myths in postcolonial writings have a liberating function as they help redeem positive symbols from negative stereotypes. A good example is the role of Dedan Kimathi and Nat Turner. While both are symbols of barbarism and terrorism in the imagination of the coloniser and the enslaver respectively, for the colonised and enslaved they represent heroic legends. As such, they become subjects of myth. Their construction into myth helps to challenge the assumptions in imperial discourses of powerlessness of the *other*, which justified the domination, repression, and exploitation of the colonised. Further, the creation of the mythic subject is not just limited to ‘outstanding’ personalities for Ngugi. We find several characters endowed with the mythic aura. We encounter passages that endow their personality with grandeur and mystery that create awe in the people around them. As a teacher Waiyaki becomes so esteemed that his image looms large in the ridges, his very

personality seems to portend the very destiny of the community.

Mythical figures permeate the social consciousness due to repeated assertion of their accomplishments. The myths themselves depend on these oral repetitions and re-enactments. In *Song of Solomon*, Solomon's feat of flying back home and escaping slavery is memorialised in song and popular folklore. The myth of Demi and Mathathi, 'the giants of the tribe' is repeated in *The River Between*, *Weep Not, Child* and *Petals of Blood*, suggesting the centrality of the myth among the Agikuyu community. Their accomplishments acquire significance in narration or performance as they symbolise deep-seated aspirations and meanings that define significant historical moments. The motifs, patterns, and images in the myths point to the most pertinent concerns that preoccupy the society. For Ngugi, the myths are predominantly about Agikuyu autochthonous assertion of belonging in Central Kenya. Land was the most contentious issue during colonisation because while it was essential to the assertion of ancestral rights of ownership and belonging for the people, it was the first resource the coloniser laid claim to. Myths helped to counter the colonialists' justifications for occupation and displacement of the original occupants of the land. Ngugi's Kihika in *A Grain of Wheat*, Nyakinyua's man, Dedan Kimathi and Ole Maasai in *Petals of Blood*, Matigari in *Matigari*, and Wariinga in *Devil on the Cross* are all constructed and imbued with an aura of heroism. Their struggles embody the revolutionary aspirations of their societies at important historical moment.

For Morrison, myths emphasise the quest for freedom: Solomon flies away from slavery in *Song of Solomon*, and the founders of Haven walk, in a momentous trek, away from the south associated with oppression and repression to found a free, prosperous, and dignified new home in the north in *Paradise*. Myth represents “the healing and formative work of man’s unconscious psychological processes, which he must learn to trust, respect, and aid in his consciousness thought and action” (Watts 13). The myths point to the people’s life-goals and remind the community what should be cherished and guarded.

Orality and the Multi-layered Text

Deconstructive method stresses that every text (oral or written) refers to other texts. Postcolonial writers interrogate the disparities between what the imperialist texts meant to say, and what they nonetheless were constrained to mean, due their complicit involvement in the imperial grand agenda, even though sometimes surreptitiously. Inherent in the imperial humanist and universalist discursive postures was a failed attempt to reconcile sameness and difference, monolithic perceptions and diversity, self and other. Michel Rosenfeld asserts that any claim of self-present original intent only forecloses intersubjectivity: “A writing may give the impression of having achieved the desired reconciliation, but such impression can only be the product of ideological distortion, suppression of difference or subordination of the other” (160). This is even more evident in discourses of contested identities

and competing power relations as imperialism narratives were.

Stephen Slemon posits that postcolonial discourse involves “anti- or *post*-colonial *discursive* purchase in culture” (3). In colonised and enslaved communities, oral artists challenged the assumptions of imperialism in their performances. Building on these antecedents, Ngugi and Morrison use specific strategies to further oppose past and on-going colonial and imperial inscriptions “onto the body and space of its Other” as Slemon would say (3). In analysing the texts and their layered subtexts in which images, symbols, and metaphors resonate and re-echo the history and impacts of the African encounter with European imperialism, there is a broad spectrum of intertexts, multi-voiced allusions, and hidden polemics in the layers of meanings, contexts, and connotations in the works of the two writers. Oral literature is by nature didactic, hence it is characterised not only with aesthetic qualities, but also with deliberate subversive intents. This is evident in the way it deploys satire, hyperbole, and irony to privilege the weak against the strong, where the supposed weaker characters succeed in outwitting the strong. Morrison consciously draws from the rich heritage of African American folklore to construct characters and themes whose full meaning and role can only be completely understood within the intertextuality of her work in relation to the African American oral aesthetic tradition. Some oral narrative characters whose traits, symbolism, allegory, and allusive power find echo in Morrison’s fictive creations are Breh Rabbit, Signifying Monkey, Tar Baby, and the different manifestations of master and slave characters. Gates Jr.

and McKay observe that folktales have always been part of African American cultural expression, “serving as equipment for survival and sustenance” (102). The oral texts now form part of folkloric heritage and communication markers specific to the community. They provide images the community employ to understand and explain their experiences, fears, aspirations, and worldviews.

Imperial discourse, through different disciplines, and using different media, generated images of the colonised that were largely stereotypical. As Robert Reid-Pharr notes, “the master, trapped in the myth of autonomy, had always to deny his dependence on the slave by asserting his complete control over the body and mind of the property” while the slave, on the other hand, had to “deny his or her autonomy. He had to construct a self that could survive amid constant rituals of dominance and degradation” (76).

Trudier Harris argues that folklore for Morrison is a process. “Instead of simply including isolated items of folklore, she manages to simulate the ethos of folk communities, to saturate her novels with a folk aura intrinsic to the texturing of the whole” (11). There is an engagement with oral material and features in ways that deconstruct imperial discourses. *Sula* opens in a memorable rendering reminiscent of formulaic opening of an oral narrative performance, creating a folkloric aura in the novel from the beginning. The anecdote of “the nigger joke” is constructed on similar oral narratives that dealt with the reversal of the popular myth of black buffoon. They depict both black and white as the tricksters. The narratives also assert that the enslaved

were not powerless, lazy, or shiftless as the stereotypes constructed them. Examples of such narratives as recorded by Hughes and Bontemps are “Big Sixteen” (61), “Uncle John’s Prophetic Error” (82-84), “Pompey an de Lawd” (84-87). Through irony, humour, allusion, and figures of speech these narratives deconstruct a number of idealised pro-slavery myths that governed master/slave relationships. Some of the most targeted stereotypes for critical reversal are those of the caring and paternalistic master and the compliant and contented slave. The narratives, as demonstrated in “the nigger joke” in the novel humorously destabilises the mask of plantation wellbeing, and through hyperbole analyses the hypocrisy that underlie the myth. By utilising this folkloric genre as an intertext Morrison reviews the continuing patterns of marginalisation and construction of hierarchies reminiscent of slavery in post-slavery America. On the other hand, ‘Sweet Home’ in *Beloved* demonstrates the unsustainable myth of the plantation as home for contented enslaved people. After being set free as a result of her son’s “renting himself” out for her release, Baby Suggs nevertheless notes that Mr Garner let her go because she had been completely exhausted (too old and with a broken hipbone); and that he will ensure he gets every possible penny from her son’s labour, the sum total of his life’s worth. As Mr Garner smugly enumerates his own paternalistic qualities, Baby Suggs thinks: “But you got my boy and I’m all broke down. You be renting him out to pay for me way after I’m gone to glory” (172).

Most conflicts in oral literature depicting slave experience revolve around violence and food. While the

enslaved are subjected to brute physical labour, they are still denied adequate nutrition. *Beloved* deals with several stereotypes that sought to maintain the myths that ensured black exclusion and marginalisation on the one hand and the status quo of white dominated political and economic power on the other. Morrison re-deploys or re-interprets the images generated by these stereotypes, seeking to deconstruct and subvert them, or re-assert the revolutionary spirit of those who opposed them. Therefore, numerous episodes in *Beloved* allude to the conflicts that arose from the enforcement, resistance, and ultimate revolt against these stereotypes that sought to maintain perpetual servitude. An example is the confrontation between Schoolteacher and Sixo accused of stealing a shoat. Sixo argues that his taking the young pig, slaughtering it and cooking it to feed himself are for general improvement of the plantation: ‘Sixo plant rye to give the high piece a better chance. Sixo take and feed the soil, give you more crop. Sixo take and feed Sixo give you more work’ (224). Under the power contest, the legitimate wellbeing of the enslaved who are the producers is not considered. So schoolteacher unilaterally decides how much Sixo can work; and how little he can eat. When Sixo challenges this power by taking and feeding himself from part of the products of his labour schoolteacher uses violence, another tool of subjugation the slave institution avails him: “Clever, but schoolteacher beat him anyway to show him that definitions belonged to the definers -not the defined” (225). On her part, Sethe resists being labelled as a mere breeder, subhuman, or subservient Mammy, insisting on her unique individuality and right to motherhood and

family. Sixo, a revolutionary figure in the novel, conscientizes the other enslaved at Sweet Home; he chooses death over perpetual servitude.

Song of Solomon and *Beloved* revolve around trauma and quest for healing and regeneration. In *Beloved* Morrison deals with the trauma of the Middle Passage, plantation slavery, and the impacts of the resulting genocide. This is aptly captured in the epigraph at the beginning of the novel, "Sixty million and more." The tragic magnitude of loss is further underscored in the biblical allusion, "I will call them my people, /which were not my people; /and her beloved, /which was not beloved." *Beloved*'s character symbolises these lost millions. These are examples of paratextuality, the direct allusion that plainly signals intertextuality. *Beloved* is cast in the realm of the supernatural, steeped in the African American folkloric spirit in which stories of conjuration, ghosts, and the otherworldly coexist with daily reality. Through gossip and re-telling the story of the return of the ghost child becomes part of the lore of the African American community in Cincinnati. It is quickly embellished with hyperbole and its meaning re-interpreted and re-deployed to become a legend (301-3). This appropriation through improvisation and transmission leads to the community embracing Sethe back to the communal fold through the ritual of exorcism that finally rids 124 of its haunting (304-9).

In *Tar Baby* Morrison saturates her work with folkloric aura. Its richly woven allusions and echoes of African American oral literature features create intertexts that provide it with multiple interpretative possibilities. The main character of tar baby subgenre is usually a

trickster who invades someone's territory, is trapped by the tar baby, but manages to outwit his or her captors. Morrison's *Tar Baby* allusively and symbolically brings to play numerous images and the conflicts generated from many years of African and European interactions in America. The hidden polemics that underlie the images, actions, and conflicts in the novel reveal the power relations and popular stereotypes that were refracted in the many versions of the tar-baby trickster narratives. When Son sneaks into L'Arbe la Croix, he becomes a mysterious force that sees but remains unseen. The different reactions of the characters when they first become aware of his presence reveal the multilayered undercurrents within this microcosm of American privileged class that is the Valerian household.

The stereotypes of tar-baby oral tales are images of the enslaved in various casts -animalistic, sexualised, amoral, criminal, potential rapist, runaway felon, buffoon and entertainer. Like the Brer Rabbit in 'Tar Baby' (Hughes and Bontemps 1-2), Son sneaks around in the dark when the rest of the people are asleep to find food; hence 'stealing' what others have worked for or put aside. He violates the ordered norms of the household, just as Brer Rabbit violates boundaries. Though he watches the women in the house in their sleep, and even manipulates Jadine's dreams, there is a reversal of the stereotypes when he does not attempt to rape any of the women, but shows sexual inclinations towards the white woman. Between Jadine and Son, there is the constant merging and changing of trickster and the tar-baby roles. In some episodes Son could be read as the tar baby and Jadine the trickster. In others, the roles merge or alternate. At one

time, Jadine is irresistibly attracted to Son's sexuality as Brer Rabbit is drawn to the tempting tar baby. Later it seems that Son is drawn sexually to Jadine in ways that echo Brer Rabbit's entrapment to the tar baby.

When he is finally discovered by Margaret in her closet and is caught and brought to Valerian, Son relies on stereotypical roles to project himself as harmless and non-threatening to Valerian's male patriarchal hegemony and Margaret's feminine innocence and purity. Like Pilate's demonstration at the police station in *Beloved*, double consciousness is a trickster strategy that reveals the complex understanding of human nature and the psychology of domination versus subordination, which enabled the oppressed to survive in certain circumstances where direct confrontation seemed counterproductive. In the tradition of the trickster, when circumstances and expediency demands it, Son projects himself in the stereotypical role of the frightened 'darky,' assuring Valerian of his status of dominance; then as a happy, grinning asexual black ready to entertain Valerian. But Son is demonstrating comically the unreliability of the power assigned through stereotypical images and identifications, but which still informs continuing prejudice and marginalisation. Valerian's demand that Son explain exactly what he was doing in his wife's bedroom (122) brings to the fore the sexual assumptions that characterise racial relations. Within this context, and to ensure his security, with the kimono he is wearing slipping and for a moment exposing his genitals to Valerian's gaze, Son entertains the white man with a joke about "three colored whores who went to heaven" in the greenhouse (148-9). The racist and sexist norms, which

ascribe the white male the apex of social hierarchy, and the black woman the lowest rung, stands out in this joke he tells Valerian. This way they all become secure in the stereotypical norms of chaste white woman, the patriarchal white male, the asexual black male, and the amoral black female. Morrison goes on to deconstruct these images and assumptions in the conflicts resulting from Odin's revelations about Margaret's abuse of her son, the sterility of Valerian and Margaret domestic life, and the relations between Son and Jadine.

At the height of colonialism, many oral forms, especially songs, appropriated Christian symbols and imagery and incorporated them in their themes and characterisation. One such symbol that reverberates in Ngugi's stories is the messianic character. The characterisation of Waiyaki in *The River Between* blends the qualities of traditional legendary heroism and Christian saviour-leader. The same qualities are found in other heroes in the freedom struggle that are depicted in all Ngugi's novels. The image is a constant reminder for the colonised of the quest for freedom, and the celebration of the revolutionary spirit that inspired and kept alive the aspiration. Like Christ figures, these heroes inspire the colonised or oppressed masses to a consciousness of their marginalised states, take up the struggle and are ready to face any consequences in their resistance. Such leaders are persecuted by the hegemonic powers, and mostly end up as martyrs of the struggle. Kihika in *A Grain of Wheat* is an example although the heroism of Kihika alludes to the legendary Mau Mau leader, Dedan Kimathi, who is directly represented in *Petals of Blood* through Abdulla's reminiscences.

Matigari is constructed around the extended image of the return of a messianic figure who is not heeded, and is routed by the 'evil' forces who have usurped the freedom he fought for. Through the character of Matigari Ngugi examines the varied manifestations of the betrayal in postcolonial Africa under neo-colonial dictatorship, and the possibility, however dim, of the re-budding of the shoots of the revolutionary spirit.

In *Devil on the Cross* Ngugi mostly relies on popular oral narrative characters for intertexts. The characters' traits are directly referred to or are alluded to in the novel. The title of the novel, *Matigari*, is as complex as it is an explicit and implied intertext. Matigari means 'remnants' and, implicitly, the continuation of the liberation struggle, the indefeasible freedom warriors, or the undying revolutionary spirit. In *Devil on the Cross*, the image of the devil prefigures the biblical Satan, the coloniser, the ogre in traditional oral narratives, and alludes to postcolonial tyranny. The novel amalgamates many intertexts allusively, allegorically, and symbolically but imposes its own unique demands on them by re-interpreting, structuring, signifying, and covert or overt citations. Therefore, the author's unique manipulation constrains how far we interpret the intertexts in relation to the role they play in advancing the novel's themes and aesthetic quality. For instance, the stories of the old man from Bahati Nakuru which Gatuiria remembers are both explicit and implicit intertexts. While their basis is traditional, the narrator manipulates and situates them contextually in the colonial and post-independent, neo-colonial era. The character of the ogre is manipulated to serve Ngugi's

authorial and ideological functions. It is directly linked to the robbers and thieves (capitalistic and neo-colonial stooges) in the cave. The story depicts the struggle between peasants and an exploitative economic system fostered by capitalism and religious brainwashing: “As the peasant became progressively thinner and more depressed at heart, the ogre prospered and flourished, to the extent of being inspired to sing hymns that exhorted the peasant to endure his lot on Earth with fortitude, for he would later find his rest in Heaven” (59). The devil or the ogre further represents soulless beings, the acme of all that can be wrong with a society, and which calls for decisive steps to rid the society of them. This is demonstrated in another oral tale narrated to Gaturia by the old man of Bahati, Nakuru. When the elders discover that Nding’uri has surrendered his soul to the devil, they see him as a witch and a louse, and do not hesitate to remove him from their midst through a ritual of sacrifice and cleansing: ‘This one will drink up all the blood of all the people until there is no more blood left in the land.’ And then and there they seized him, and wrapped him up with dry banana leaves, and burned him and his house’ (63).

In some instances in *Devil on the Cross*, character traits echo popular or stock oral literature characters such as the chameleon, hare, ogre, hyena, lion, praying mantis or crocodile. Kihaahu wa Gatheeca’s physical features associate him with a parasite that sucks the blood of its victims, emphasising the avarice that places him in the league of thieves and robbers: “he looked like a 6-foot praying mantis or a mosquito” (107). Gatheeci wa Kihuuhia also connotes parasitic tendencies. Thus the

names of the main characters are grounded allusively and symbolically in Kikuyu folkloric traditions, and are used to infer the values and conflicts of the post-independent Kenya. In Kikuyu folklore and popular usage, Nding'uri connotes a wealthy and proud person while Ndaaya wa Kahuria connotes an individual associated with grabbing. Likewise, Nditika wa Nguunji associates the character with hoarding what has grabbed. Gitutu wa Gataanguru links the character to the traits of a hyena in folklore such as greed. Kimeendeeri wa Kanyuanji connotes destructiveness associated with dominance.

The protagonists in the novel have redeeming features and their names suggest subversiveness or society's capacity to reform. Muturi refer to healing or reconstructive potential of the blacksmith, likewise his character and actions are contrasted to the rest associated with destructive potentials. Like Muturi, Wangari, Wariinga, and Gatuiria have positive connotations that symbolise their emancipatory and revolutionary function in the novel. Wangari in Kikuyu traditional folklore refer to one of the mythical nine clans. Further, Wangari literally means 'like the leopard,' implying the clan's fierceness/ bravery and all the qualities associated with the leopard. Waaringa literally means one who used to be a female or woman but whom the system has changed; she is no longer the same woman, at least according to society's patriarchal or sexist definitions of a woman's place. Gatuiria connotatively refer to a quest or a search, one who investigates issues. Despite his privileged position, he is unsettled about the state of things in his society and therefore wants to know what is wrong and possibly help to make it equal and better.

As with the parodies of biblical passages, Ngugi literalises oral character traits and other features in *Devil on the Cross*. They are used as subtexts coalescing around one another as a structural whole. Therefore, the reading of the novel demands a revisit of the source-texts and keenness to the implied resistance or reversal of the intertexts. Ngugi has especially taken issue with the role of Christianity in Western Imperialism. He is also critical of the inequality and instability caused by colonialism in the first place, and sustained in post-independent Africa by neo-colonial economic and military interference. This enables him to satirise post-independent nepotism, greed, and corruption in African nations effectively. His intertexts also reverse the hegemonic narratives of development and modernity that the post-independent status quo uses to camouflage the institutions and systems that oppress and marginalise the masses.

The search for assertive identities and a viable sense of belonging for their fictional creations is, therefore, part of wa Thiong'o's and Morrison's artistic devices to subvert the colonialist images and dominant power arrangements against the colonised/ dominated African and African American people. Ngugi and Morrison conflate folkloric modes and oral literature features with modern artistic features to project revolutionary aesthetics and themes that are purposively subversive, deconstructive, and restorative. This use of forms of oral traditions that are easily and effectively blended in the written text, and their aesthetic function of advancing significant thematic concerns relating to the experience of home, belonging and identity, closely links Morrison's and Ngugi's artistic

expressions. Both writers interrogate the impacts of colonialism and slavery, and the different, but related, images that came to dominate the relationship between imperial Europe and its *other*. The political and cultural authorial vision of Ngugi comes out strongly through the infusion of his novels' form and content with features and qualities of oral literature. The same is true of Morrison in her representation of African American historical experience. The vivification of oral aesthetic devices drawn from their societies implies that true emancipation must involve whole round de-colonisation - cultural, aesthetic, political, linguistic, and economic.

Chapter 9

Tanure Ojaide

Ekundayo, S B

Proverbs are the palm oil with which words are eaten.
- Chinua Achebe

I

PROVERBS and aphorisms are related figurative ways of using language in Africa. Achebe's novels not only popularised their use in African fiction but encrusted them as integral attributes of African cultural locution. Aphorism may include proverbs because proverbs themselves are aphorismic. In fact, most proverbs are aphorisms but not all aphorisms may pass for proverbs. Some other terms for *aphorism* are *maxim*, *precept*, *apothegm*, *wit*, etc. In strict context we may establish a nuance between aphorism and proverb. Aphorisms come more directly than proverbs. They are usually short, devoid of elaborate analogies, comparisons or symbolisms characteristic of proverbs. Aphorisms are striking phrases and statements that convey truth, wisdom and humour. They are analogous to epigrams in poetry,

but shorter in form. Some examples of aphorisms in Nigerian society are ‘men will always be men,’ ‘no condition is permanent,’ ‘heaven helps those who help themselves,’ ‘to become a man is not easy,’ ‘the truth is bitter, but we must say it,’ etc.

Proverbs, on the other hand, come “in more or less fixed form marked by shortness, sense and salt distinguished by the popular acceptance of the truth tersely expressed in it” (Finnegan 393). They often contain metaphors and symbolisms, analogies and wits. They have deeper structures and meanings extracted from the surface structures than mere aphorismic statements, reflecting “old-age wisdom” many of them being “rhetorical, humorous and imagistic” (Akporoaro 110).

African story telling consists of creating literary characters or human beings in a work, giving them roles and human or inhuman attributes. Characters in African stories may thus be human, animal, spirits and even non-living things. Several ways exist for delineating literary characters. Abrams summarizes them to two ways. These are “showing” and “telling”. In showing, the writer presents the characters in their actions and behaviours to the audience or readers to pass their judgment. In telling, the writer personally comments on the characters, exposing their natures and personalities (33-4). Murphy identifies a number of ways in which characterization is done. These are through: “personal description, character as seen by another, comments of the author, the past life of the character as presented in the work, conversation of others, the characters’ reactions to issues and events, what the characters themselves say, soliloquy and spoken thoughts (161-173).

To analyse Ojaides's proverbs, we must take into account some theories and concepts about proverb use: (i) the cognitive approach with reference to the theories of "proverb as a species of metaphor," and "proverb as an analogical, problem-solving model;" (ii) the ethnographic/ anthropological theory which sees "proverb as folklore and performance-based"; (iii) the integrative approach, which is a combination of the good sides of different theories; and (iv) African (writers') concept of proverbs as an integral way of life and expression of being.

The cognitive theory is concerned with how the human mind receives, processes and interprets proverbs. "Proverbs as species of metaphor" and "proverb as analogy" theories are of the cognitive approach. Lakoff and Turner argue that a series of metaphors and images that reflect concepts condition our thinking and mind at a deep subconscious level. They say that proverbs are more or less poems to be interpreted. Like other metaphors, proverbs make readers/ listeners identify a "source domain" and match the source domain with "the target domain" which the context of use may give or not give. A source domain is the area or occupation of life from where the proverb is formed and the target domain is the area to which meaning is imposed. Accordingly, four basic tools assist the audience of a proverb to reconcile the source domain with the target domain to derive the contextual meaning. These are "the generic is specific", "the concept of the Great Chain of Being", "the nature of things" and "the principle of verbal economy and the maxim of quantity." The generic is specific means that reference to images and metaphors have a specific source

just as the intended target domain is specific or specified. The concept of the Great Chain of Being relates to our collective unconscious, the sets of beliefs we inherited, which assist us in understanding our world, our language and expressing ourselves. These two combine with our universal knowledge of the nature of things, how things work, the arrangement of nature, etc and lastly with verbal economy and the maxim of quantity, at which level we can separate what is relevant from what is irrelevant to extract meanings (167).

An example they use to illustrate these four tools of proverb interpretation is

Ants on millstone
Whichever way they walk
They go round with it

The source domain is the world of ants on a millstone. The target domain is not quite specified. It is left for the listener to interpret or identify. The Great Chain of Being stimulates us to see what ants are and what they could stand for and their place in the ecosystem. The principle of verbal economy makes us avoid unnecessary details about ants and millstones. Practical knowledge of the nature of things enables us to see that ants by nature are small creatures and that a millstone rolls. So, the movement of ants on a millstone does not affect the millstone. Rather, the rolling of the millstone controls the movement of the ants.

On the other hand, Honeck asserts that cultural context enrich the study of proverbs, although he does not emphasize the cultural context but says that proverbs can

be taken away from the cultural specifics since “the mental structures and processes of the *Homo sapiens* are explainable on the basis of theoretical principles” (37). He argues, against this backdrop, that proverbs are not poems to be interpreted but problem to be solved in a face-to-face situation. Honeck’s theory presumes two cognitive contexts for proverb use: “the irrelevant” and “the relevant.” In the first context, the listener is given only the source domain. S/he is then left to determine the target domain. In the irrelevant context, going by Honeck and Temple’s example, a listener runs into a proverb or vice versa “out of the blues.” For example, a stranger in an elevator or lift tells another stranger: “A net with a hole in it won’t catch any fish” (68). Or on the street, a stranger tells a stranger “Not every oyster contains a pearl” (128). Invariably, the stranger tries attempts to interpret the proverb in different ways. Since the usage may not be amenable to literal interpretation at the level of physical oyster, s/he moves to the literary level and applies his knowledge of the nature of things, oyster and pearls to extract meanings that could apply. That oyster could be pearl-less is given or taken for granted, and so irrelevant, but the relevant thing is the essence and intention of the proverb. If the street user of this proverb intends a specific meaning, he may have to supply the clue which becomes “the conceptual base” of the proverb. The speaker may display a scratched useless lottery card to his addressee, which then explains the proverb. Honeck and Temple later add the concept of “the cognitive ideals,” which they use to explain the opposing, binary nature of proverbs, the ideal and the

otherwise, the imperfect nature of things. Ideally, oysters should contain pearls, but sometimes, they do not.

In this way proverbs become abstractions that can be interpreted by theoretical rules, not necessarily as culture-situation based: “The fact that proverbs can be created anew is important theoretically because it makes it clear that individual proverbs do not have to be part of the linguistic heritage of a culture” (99) as “minds operate by universal principles” (218).

Honeck’s conclusion is questionable and so is Lakoff’s and Turner’s. Bradbury and Arora, among many other scholars who propose either the integrative or the ethnographic/ anthropological approach, have criticized the strands of theories in the cognitive approach. Bradbury is of the view that Lakoff and Turner “do not inquire into the context that produce their *Asian Figures*” just as Honeck shows “little concern about the sources of his examples.”

When we turn to evidence from Middle Ages (or if we were to examine an existing society where proverbs use is culturally central), we meet strong tradition-bearers, those who hold a repertoire of proverbs in memory and use then, in ways not accounted for by either theory....

Both cognitive theories focus their attention almost exclusively on the intellectual gymnastics of innocent bystanders accosted by proverbs. But familiarity with the living traditions studied by ethnographers or the once-living tradition depicted in Chaucer’s fiction compels us to ask also about the mental activity involved in proverb production. Who are these people in Honeck’s theory

who pop into elevators and utter proverbs? How do they come up with proverbs? Why do they use them? (274-5)

Similarly, Mieder argues that proverbs are of the folk: “A proverb is a short, generally known sentence of the folk which contains wisdom, truth, morals and traditional views in a metaphorical, fixed and memorizable form and which is handed down from generation to generation” (24). He has established in various works that proverbs are culture-based, comes in a number of figurative and imagistic ways and the rich cultural legacies of diverse peoples of the world. For Africans and African writers proverbs and their uses transcend theories and intellectual hair splitting. Africans live in a world of proverbs, and this reality reflects in their works. Mieder rightly says that West Africa has the richest stock of proverbs in the world (108) and African writers have amply shown this in their works. Achebe’s conceptualization of proverb as “the palm oil with which words are eaten” (5) should be taken seriously because it is laden with meanings. Examining the aesthetics of proverbs in African fiction, Osani notes:

The African proverb is a distinctive aspect of the use of language employed mainly by adults in informal conversations as well in formal speeches at meetings, conferences and other occasions. In Nigeria, proverbs appear in literature -whether traditional or modern- and in other arts, especially music. They have been demonstrably used by Nigerian writers in poetry, drama and prose fiction not only to project the cultural values of

the people, but more importantly, to also achieve aesthetic effect. (95)

We submit that it is more practically and intellectually rewarding to integrate all the strengths of various theories without their weaknesses. Proverbs, first all, belong to a people, a tradition and culture, and they are handed down from generation to generation as metaphoric, symbolic or aphorismic representations. Writers or speakers, being members of the society of proverbs, then use them in their works and speeches. Thereafter, the hearers' processes of cognition take over to interpret them, the hearers also being members of the society.

II

Proverbs in Ojaide's Work

The use of proverbs is a major distinguishing narrative style of African novels. It is difficult to read an African/ Nigerian novel without running into strings of proverbs and aphorisms because the artful and apt use of proverbs is a remarkable and distinguishing characteristic of oratory, orators and general interaction in traditional African settings. Quite often, Nigerian novelists lace or sprinkle their narratives with proverbs which enhance the telling of their tales. From the pioneer novelists like Achebe to recent ones like Ojaide, the use of proverbs has remained one of the hallmarks of the genres. In the words of Uyo,

the use of proverbs shows conversational eloquence and ...sayings are usually learnt from listening to elders... Proverbs can be used in several ways to teach moral lessons, influence people...and to entertain. A number of Nigerian prose writers are exceptionally skillful in the creative use of proverbs in their works of fiction....the creative use of figurative language is one of the greatest achievements of the author and this makes the novel interesting to read even as a narrative about contemporary issues.(6)

Similarly, Ogunjimi and N’Allah recognise in proverbs “the ingredients of harmonizing the life rhythm of any community” (65). Thus the use of proverbs betrays the *Africanness* of the writers and projects the settings and thematic preoccupations of their works. According to Jegede,

Proverbs speak louder than words... Proverbs form a pool of linguistic and thematic resources from which speakers and writers...have drawn...

The functions of proverbs as means of embellishing speech and performance, projecting the business sense of a people, portraying the image of a community and preserving the history and culture of a people are usually reflected in literary works. (35-6)

As a writer Ojaide “engages metaphors, images, linguistic and semantic manipulations and legends from folktales and history to speak his thoughts, make his points and depict topical issues” (Olaofioye 7). His works are animated through “communal landscape given in

myth, folklore and common histories that provide a community with a source of identity” (Okuyade 24). Carruth acknowledges that Ojaide is “supple, strong, various, colourful, moving and invariably interesting” (qtd. in Olaofioye 105). Ojaide himself admits that the poet seems to be translating from local language to English (67). Indeed, literal translations and renditions of local languages and structures permeate Ojaide’s creative works. In the same literary tradition, Ojaide consciously infuses his novel with proverbs that enrich his narrative.

Matters of the Moment is set in the 1990s Nigeria during the heydays of military rule. Dede, the hero, is a journalist trained in the United States of America. He returns to Nigeria brimming with principles and ideologies for change. However, his marriage is cut short by a dirty divorce case. Franka, his divorced wife, becomes a socialite who uses her femininity to influence highly placed men and climb the corridors of power. There is a reversal of fortune when General Ogiso, the military head of state dies in strange circumstances. The trend of events yokes the divorced couple in crisis and together they unseat a military tyrant.

There are approximately fifteen proverbs in the novel. The first is right in the opening paragraph of the narrative. When Franka, the heroine, meets Dede, the hero, whom she believes is her ‘Mr Right,’ the author uses a proverb to reveal and concretize the feelings of the characters and also foreshadows the imminence of a love affair and possibly marriage between them: “When the ripe cherry fruit finds its favourite, it falls freely for the chosen one to pick” (6). The use of this proverb gives

readers insight into the thinking and expectation of Franka Udi.

In another example, in his unpublished poem, Dede refers to General Ogiso as “the leopard” whose “anger could only be appeased with blood” (34). The full form of this proverb in local usage and in folktales is: ‘Only blood can appease the rage of a leopard.’ This proverb, which clearly delineates Ogiso as a tyrant, is also a warning that Dede will pay dearly for it should he publish the poem. So he keeps the poem till a more auspicious time.

Somewhere in the narrative, Ode, one of the major characters, is hesitant to enter into another marriage, having failed in his first marriage. This experience is captured in an apt proverb: “One who already had a cold from one divorce could get pneumonia from a second one” (67). In this context, we see that he has misgivings about another marriage and so is hesitant and cautious, reminding us of the English aphorism, ‘once beaten, twice shy.’ Similarly, when Franka falls in love for the second time with Chief Ugbo, she observes that an “animal that had escaped from a trap avoids an arced stick”. Was the same caution not exercised by a fish that had struggled out of hook in avoiding whatever metal-held bait it came across?” (88). The underlying message here is that divorce or broken home can generate apathy and misgivings for marriage. In characterization, it shows Franka gaining in psychological maturity and experience, and foretells the change Franka will soon begin to exhibit in love affairs.

Again, Furu, a female character who has not had a relationship for a time is likened to an uncultivated piece

of land. Commenting on her prolonged single status, her mother says: “A fallow field needs to be cultivated.” Her mother reinforces this with yet another proverb that states an empty market invites spirits. Here the necessity of being in a relationship or marriage is underscored. A mature person without a stable relationship is vulnerable to all manner of things: loneliness, heartache, social abuse, loss of self-confidence, childlessness, etc. These are some of the evil spirits that invade an empty market.

After undergoing a second heartbreak, Franka vows with the following aphorism: “If men had to be men, she had to be a woman” (96). We see Franka’s resolve to begin a kind of life in the use of this proverb. Men constantly have affairs with women and then walk away. In the same vein, she will henceforth chase after her own interest too. Subsequently, in a newspaper article, we meet Dede saying: everybody wants to go to heaven but does not want to die. This adaptation from popular Caribbean reggae lyrics of the eighties is used to show people’s general love and desire for a good society, riches and the sweet things of life. Unfortunately, however, people are often not willing and ready to pay the supreme price.

Franka thinks of ‘microwaving’ a degree in law through illegal means and sharp practices and at the same time reflects on the consequences of treading such a path. She fears that she may not be able to practise with a law degree acquired with the microwave of sharp practices, and that will be disgraceful in the end. This spectre is captured in the proverb that states “the wind would blow feathers off the fowl’s behind and everyone would see the eyesore.” Its symbolic note is if she bribes her way

through school, her mediocrity and counterfeit degree would be exposed during practice in court. The quintessence of Ojaide's proverbs emerges on page 148 of the novel where the author drops a cluster to accentuate a very important point:

One cannot allow the leopard and its cubs to terrorize the land. Let other animals use their wits to bring down their tormentor. The small bird animals that are possible victims of the leopard could catch the monstrous animal asleep and deal it a death blow. If all fowls are united, the hawk would not succeed in snatching a single one away. It is only when broomsticks are tied together that they sweep clean.

With this, Ojaide mobilizes his audience and reinforces his clarion call for a united action against evil and oppression. The theme being stressed by the use of these proverbs is the need for unity, the power of tact and unity. Elsewhere Dede likens the people's lethargy, inertia and complacency to the scenario of "the angry dog" which "has been given a sop and its bark and bite are gone back to sleep" (100). In this proverb, Ojaide invokes the tradition of resisting injustice and corruption in Nigeria -the setting of the novel. Like angry dogs, people bark loudly as if they could really bite. But once they are offered 'kola' or government appointment, etc., they turn their eyes the other way, sleeping and snoring while society deteriorates. Franka Udi all along has been avoiding Dede, her estranged husband. However, her game of hide-and-seek culminates in her running to Dede toward the end of the novel. This experience is wrapped

in the aphorism of someone fleeing from death who ironically finds death squatting in front of her in her so-called hideout or refuge. (181). Franka finds Dede standing before her in her most exigent moment. Dede against whom she is imbued with the passions of vengeance is now on the person to save her from the mob.

The use of proverbs and aphorisms in *Matters of the Moment* underscores an artistic development that makes the narrative interesting and evocative. These proverbs reinforce the subject-matter of human vice, the social scourge of a broken home, the challenges of divorce and single parenthood, and the spectacle of vengeance, oppression and bad governance in Africa. Besides, these proverbs put a stamp of *Africanness* on Ojaide's narrative, revealing the socio-cultural peculiarities of its environment.

Chapter 10

Lianja Epic

Dudley, S

IN HER influential work, *Feminism Without Borders*, Chandra Talpade Mohanty discusses the divergent feminisms of Western and Third World origin. Mohanty describes U.S.-based feminism as class-centric and academic, located within a protocapitalist norm which avoids or ignores the need for collectivity. This feminism lacks the solidarity that Mohanty seeks, the “mutuality, accountability, and the recognition of common interests as the basis for relationships among diverse communities” (7). Mohanty's political solidarity and theory in praxis proposes that women pursue a collective empowerment based on understanding and appreciation rather than difference and pity. Similarly, there are preexistent alternatives to Western patriarchy and cultural imperialism being discussed by African scholars such as the contributors to the online journal, JENDA; these contributions demonstrate Mohanty's transnational feminist theory in praxis. Scholars in fields of study such as sociology and anthropology develop and utilize their perspective to increase understanding of African

communities. Essentially, this recent movement reclaims feminism in a mother-centered African context, and so we may refer to this emergent school of thought as matrifocal feminism. The sociological foundation of matrifocal feminism offers a theoretical method for considering female characterization in African classical literature. This study applies theories of matrifocal feminism to an analysis of Lianja epic, an African oral text.² This application of theory is used as a means of investigating the characterization and political power of female figures in the narrative, and determining the cultural and literary contribution of the text to the discussion of transnational feminist community.

Matrifocal feminism and its “co-mothering” community offer a possible alternative and means for political solidarity. Oyèrónké Oyěwùmí rejects the globalization of the term sisterhood as a post-colonial form of Western imperialism (“Introduction,” *African Women and Feminism*). She points out that the term does not carry the same political or social meanings in an African context. In the place of this “sisterhood,” she prefers co-mothering:

To an African reader...the model of motherhood is absolutely natural, because if anything binds women together in collective experience, it is child-bearing and the mothering of children, and consequently the nurturing of community. [emphasis added] (5)

Oyěwùmí proposes a non-Western alternative for a global ideal of feminist community as developed in co-mothering communities. In the above passage, she

articulates specific aspects of matrifocality that can extend to all members of a community. Child-bearing and mothering imply separate but cohesive acts; child-bearing as a biological privilege, and mothering as acts of nurturing that a mother bestows on her child, and which all members of the community might put into practice, regardless of gender, age, or identity differences.

Matrifocal feminism articulates a sense of self-determination and agency grounded in the respect given to the role of women in motherhood and through acts of mothering. According to Oyèrónké Oyěwùmí and Mojúbàolú Olúfúnke Okome, in a Yoruba community the mother assumes political, economic, and communal power as the central figure of the family. The respect afforded to this familial position means that,

In this family system...motherhood is the most important source and model of solidarity, and being a mother is perceived as an attractive and desirable goal to achieve. (“Introduction” 13)

Motherhood's central importance to the family and the community suggests a matriarchal society. Oyěwùmí establishes the importance of all relationships grounded in [African] women's identification with motherhood and mothering. The Yoruba society places mothers at the center around which family and community are structured. Relationships within the family are delineated by that role: the term for sibling, “omo-iyá,” has no gender implication and means “my mother's child,” indicating a shared experience of the same womb. Beyond this societal or familial construct, “omo-iyá” also

“emblemizes unconditional love, togetherness, unity, solidarity, and loyalty” (9-10). Oyěwùmí’s goal is to establish the transcendent quality of motherhood while still acknowledging the communal value of mothering, or nurturing acts, that can be practiced by men and women.

In her discussion of female roles in Yoruba society, Mojúbàolú Olúfúnke Okome includes the Yoruba saying: “There is no deity like the mother, mothers are the ones that we ought to worship” (15). If mothers are to be respected as deities, then they implicitly possess the power to both create and punish. When a society confers this type of respect on mothers, all women within the community possess the same potential of power and self-definition.

Cheikh Anta Diop in his work, *The Cultural Unity of Black Africa: The Domains of Patriarchy and of Matriarchy in Classical Antiquity*, provided a seminal study of the matriarchal system of African communities. He anchored his efforts to establish a historical unity for Black Africa by demonstrating the sense of purpose and self-determination understood to belong to women/mothers in their communities, and applied the power of matriarchal politics to the whole of Black Africa communities. His study proposes that the historical unity of pre-colonial Africa can be established by examining the role of the mother in African history. It is important to note Diop's argument that matriarchy is not an inversion of patriarchy. Unlike patriarchy's history of blatant subjugation of females, Diop posits:

Matriarchy is not an absolute or cynical triumph of women over man; it is a harmonious dualism, an

association accepted by both sexes, the better [system] to build a sedentary society where each and everyone could fully develop by following the activity best suited to his physiological nature. A matriarchal régime, far from being imposed on man by circumstances independent of his will, is accepted and defended by him. (108)

In effect, the privileging of females in a matriarchal society actually affords an equal status and partnership with men. It empowers and respects both sexes in relation to each other rather than existing as an inversion of patriarchal power.

In accordance with the visions of solidarity by feminists such as Chandra Mohanty and Oyèrónké Oyěwùmí, and the research of Cheikh Anta Diop, *The Lianja Epic*, as a 14th-century text, offers a preexistent literary portrayal of a feminist and matrifocal community in praxis based on the tenets of matriarchal society. Within this text, mothers are central and supportive in a setting that fosters beauty in relationships between all peoples. Motherhood's primary role in *The Lianja Epic* underscores the relevance of Oyěwùmí and Okome's advocacy for the reconsideration of American feminism's presumptions about the global existence of patriarchy. Matrifocal feminism offers an efficient theoretical tool for the purposes of the proposed textual analysis; it encourages the critical pursuit of demonstrating the mothering qualities of major characters, male and female, within an epic such as *The Lianja Epic*. An analysis of these characters will determine the degree of matrifocality in the text and how the text provides an example of an ideal feminist community.

The Lianja Epic³ traces the events, lineage, and advent of a hero of the Mongo culture from an unspecified era in its history. The character of Lianja symbolizes the prophetic fulfillment of unity and deliverance to a promised land for the Mongo people. He is depicted as a part of the future for the community within the narrative. For the current audience of the narrative, he is part of an exulted remembrance of the past. In both capacities, his character resonates as a denotative figure of hope and unity. The Lianja Epic originated within the Mongo cultures of the current Democratic Republic of Congo and has been disseminated through generations from around the fourteenth century (Maneniang' "Introduction"). It explores themes of peace, unity, wisdom, worship, and reconciliation. The Mongo believe in one Creator, Ngiambe,⁴ and the division of the seen and unseen world into four cosmos. Evil spirits populate the underworld marked by darkness and suffering, humans inhabit the earth, ancestors and spirits exist in the third cosmos but interact with humans and intercede with Ngiambe on their behalf, and Ngiambe exists in the fourth cosmos with his select servant spirits. Temporal existence in the Mongo culture is "combined in a dialectical unit which is difficult [for Western people] to comprehend but which is symbolic in Mongo culture and religion" (Maneniang' "Introduction"). There is a holistic temporal uniformity where past, present and future are deeply intertwined.

Relationships between male and female characters of The Lianja Epic are imperative to understanding the individuals of both sexes within their Congolese and

African communities. This analysis illustrates how The Lianja Epic provides an example of community that could be embraced by all advocates of feminist and egalitarian communities. Female characters such as Bolombu, Ilankaka, and Mbombe mother their own children. They mother each other, as in the case of Mbombe's support and correction by other women in the community. Women of the epic mother the community; Bolombu and Mbombe accomplish this through wise counseling and action that attempts to maintain communal integrity. They co-mother as well, as witnessed in the respective roles of Mbombe and Nsongo as mother and daughter and co-mothers to Lianja. In addition, mothers are present in all generations, as seen in the women that mother the lineage of the hero. An examination of these women foregrounds the mothering conscience of their own society and suggests a cultural value specific to maternal roles.

The outstanding element of the epic, and one that illustrates the egalitarianism of matrifocal feminism, is that women as mothers require and create the presence and cooperation of men. The relationships of men and women in this epic demand inter-character analysis: one cannot be discussed without the other. In their intimate relationships with men, the female characters of Mbombe and Nsongo cultivate aspects of their individual selves. Their roles as wives, mothers, and/or sisters prevent them from acting separately from their relationships with significant male figures in their lives. They share with these men gender-transcending qualities that seem to emerge from the multitude of roles they fill beyond their individuality.

The union of Ilele and Mbombe does not diminish either character in any way. Instead, the text suggests that they are individually strengthened and increased by their marriage, for it meets the approval of their communities, makes Mongoland “radiate with new life” (2.269), and will culminate in the birth of the hero himself. The initial introduction to Mbombe comes from the perspective of a failed suitor that Ilele meets in his wife-searching journey; the individual who could not win her consent to marriage describes her as beautiful, intelligent, and hard working. She adheres to the tradition of her community, which stipulates that her husband can only be a man that defeats her in a wrestling match. Such a competition requires the display of physical and mental attributes and the outwitting of opponents that ultimately results in their respect for each other's strength, courage, and intelligence. It is these qualities that cause an instant attraction for these two characters; they recognize in each other what they value about themselves. Ilele defeats Mbombe in this contest, but she demonstrates self-determination in the fact that she defeated all of her prior suitors and already expressed a desire to marry Ilele.

The perpetuation of this epic by present-day communities within the Democratic Republic of Congo and the value it places on women indicates the shared admiration of the Mongo communities of the past and present culture for all African women as well as the Mongo.⁵ This admiration seems associated with such qualities as described of Mbombe from her husband Ilele's perspective.

Ilele knew that his father, mother and relatives

Were waiting to see the girl he had chosen for himself
A girl of plentifulness, selflessness and greatness
A girl of bravery, courage and without self-praise
A girl of kindness, power and sense of humour
A great girl whose fame was celebrated
Among the living and the dead. (2.360-366)

Ilele recognizes that Mbombe's qualities are valued by his community and ensure her place within it. Humility, courage, caring, generosity, kindness, power, and humor are traits encouraged and admired by both the living community and the Ancestors. These qualities are not self-deprecating. They indicate a self-aware, self-confident nature considerate of others. Witnessing the celebrations in the various cosmos over their union, even Ngiambe utters a blessing on Ilele and Mbombe:

'By my power and will
The evil spirits
Will never conquer those among humankind
Who remain faithful to me
And plant the seeds of love and unity' (2.320-325)

Mbombe and Ilele's faithfulness and encouragement of love and unity make them the rightful parents of the miraculous hero, one who will unite the Mongo and their enemies. These characters' actions henceforth in the events of the text delineate these qualities that the Creator appreciates in them.

Mbombe's pregnancy is proof of Ngiambe's blessing and promise to the Mongo people. In this sense, one can assume that the biological functions of women translate

into a tremendous social value, for women nurture the community's future, first within their bodies, and then within their homes and communities. Rather than being specific to their physicality, motherhood implies women's role in shaping the future through teaching and nurturing their children. Mbombe's pregnancy affords us a closer look at her fallible human nature beyond her legendary status as the wise mother of the hero, for her physical suffering causes her mental weakness. During its seemingly interminable length (2.523-525), she suffers a great deal and demonstrates human weakness.⁶ When she becomes ill from eating and must abstain from food, a bird of mysterious origin delivers the nsafu fruit that she is able to eat. Instead of consulting the advice of elders, Ancestors, or her husband, Mbombe eats the fruit, for, "Spending days and nights without food / Had been a terrible experience for [her] / Her mind and soul now opened and her body leaped for joy" (2.640-643). She sings a song of praise to the calao bird that delivered the fruit, creating enmity between herself and the community, for they and her husband share a suspicion of this mysterious bird and Mbombe's obsession with it. When Ilele, moved by her longing for this fruit, goes in search of it, the Sau-Sau and their cohorts murder him. Despite the mental weakness brought on by her physical suffering, Mbombe's motherhood inspires her husband's protectiveness and nurturing to the extent that he risks his life for her. The fact that the community respects them and depicts them as wise indicates the esteem for both motherhood and those who dedicate themselves to nurturing the mother regardless of her demands.

Motherhood affords Mbombe a unique form of power. As the mother of the hero who will unite the coming generations, Mbombe exercises her power to have considerable effect on the community's consideration of revenge for Ilele's death. Her respected status in the community allows her to challenge the elders' advocacy of violent retribution, and she manages to convince them of its folly. She couches her argument in an identification with her husband's people and community, laying claim to it as her own because "It will belong to [her] children and the children of [her] children" and even going so far as to admonish the elders by saying, "...The Mongo people's mind should not be so warped / That they become unable to tell right from wrong" (2.979-1015). While the elders eventually agree with her, they question her lack of concurrence with their own anger about the murder of Ilele. Instead of giving in to grief, Mbombe remains steadfast and coolheaded, and appeals to them in what might be their own language of knowledge, "...through bloodshed, a whole generation may change its destiny / Power finds its strings in dialogue, love, peace and reconciliation" (2.1051-1052). She gives voice to a unique suggestion of the use of power separate from force. In effect, one manifestation of the power she describes is that of motherhood. Ideally, a mother's power does not originate with her physical use of force. Instead, it comes from her role as teacher, as nurturer, and counselor to her children and the larger family or community in which she lives. These roles by definition require the 'dialogue, love, peace and reconciliation' that Mbombe exemplifies in her capacity as a mother.

The unity predicted in the prophecy about Lianja becomes evident in the relationship of humans and nature displayed in Mongoland during Mbombe's labor, even before the advent of the hero. Mbombe utilizes her faith, first to counteract the human desire for vengeance, and later to overcome her own fear at the unnatural progress of her pregnancy, for "Sometimes she lost hope and thought she was carrying a monster" (3.176). She continues to give praise to Ngiambe, thanking him in particular for using her to "perpetuate creation" and finally begins the birthing process. Her labor produces various forms of life: ants, birds, and a new race of human beings. These last forms praise her as a Mother Earth figure, singing:

We are issued from a lady Spirit
Who is the mother of the whole of mankind
She is our mother too
She was chosen by Ngiambe to perpetuate his creation'
(3.254-257)

In the process of her labor, Mbombe both creates and attracts all kinds of creatures, and "human beings of all social classes" who "converged in Nkuma /And mingled freely with each other / In the village of great miracles" (3.270-274). Mbombe's motherhood unites and creates community in an apparently unprecedented manner.

In this community, a mother must teach truth, and resist selfish and self-doubting impulses in order to combat the influence of evil. After the birth of Lianja and Nsongo, Mbombe lies about the cause of Ilele's death because of guilt over her own role in it. Her lies incur the

confusion and rage of the community, and in doing so reveal its respect for the essential nature of truth. Although Lianja is born fully grown, he still looks to his mother as a source of wisdom and knowledge. She is the one who fills the role of teacher of truth as well as nurturer despite being from a community different from his father's. It is in this capacity that Mbombe commits a significant error in judgment when she lies to Lianja about the nature of his father's death:

Nobody knew why she continued to lie to her child
Such behavior is uncommon among the Mongo
For whom the punishment for lying is beating and
hanging
Some women shouted:
'This woman, this Mbombe should be beaten to
death...'
(3.724-726)

Lying is a crime for the Mongo community, one that demands harsh punishment. As a mother, it seems a particularly egregious violation of that respected role since it is her peers in motherhood who hold her accountable. The circumstances surrounding Mbombe's lies suggest a mother-child relationship akin to a human-spirit one --not in the sense of the mother as a lesser being, but as one accountable to her child for her deception. The human-spirit relationship requires accountability for actions and a respect for the higher cosmos.

When mothers are afforded the power given to deities, as in the Yoruba societies studied by Mojúbàolú

Olúfúnke Okome and Oyèrónké Oyěwùmí, then the community also realizes the danger that females can also bring as possessors of great power. A mother, human or spirit, must relate truth to her children; she must be accountable to them as their provider of physical and emotional needs, as well as respecting the future of the community. Lianja confronts Mbombe about her lies, threatening her with physical retribution and spiritual punishment: “I shall cut off your head and make a cup of your skull / I shall cast your shadow from the cosmos of the Mongo Ancestors” (3.819-820). While this might seem extraordinarily harsh, it points again to the expectations of the community toward mothers as teachers, as nurturers, women responsible for the trustworthy care of their children and implicitly, the future of the community itself. In addition to the grave accountability of motherhood, there must also be consideration of the role of Lianja as a higher being, a Spirit, which gives him authority even over his human mother. Despite this threat, it is ultimately the spirit of truth (in the form of a flame) invoked by Lianja that moves Mbombe to tell the truth of Ilele's death: “The light opened Mbombe's thoughts and soul / It cleansed and purified her soul / She wept and confessed her sin to her child (3.843-845). Mbombe apologizes to her son, and it is the spirit of truth that induces her to do so. The community within the epic struggles at times with weaknesses and evils perpetuated in human beings by evil spirits (1.560), and so the possibility of Mbombe's guilt opening her to evil influence is a relevant concern. Her powerful role as Lianja's mother and appointed teacher and counselor requires her to resist that evil

influence and embrace her responsibility as a mother, which explains the harsh reaction of the community and Lianja himself. It is in her capacity as a mother that Mbombe apologizes to her son, for her sin is an inexcusable corruption of motherhood within the community.

Mothers are the embodiment of art in this text: they have aesthetic, didactic, and provocative purpose for their children, the community, and the reader. As depicted by the character of Mbombe, within this community, motherhood means having wisdom, power without physical force, and the ability to unify people. Mbombe accepts motherhood as a natural part of her marriage to Ilele and as a blessing from the creator, Ngiambe, and demonstrates unquestioning faith in both her husband and her creator as she faces the future of being the mother of the hero, Lianja. The quality of her character reveals her worth as an individual and as a female figure appreciated by the community. Her qualities as a woman -generosity, humility, courage and kindness- enhance her wisdom and power as a mother figure. The community also demands accountability from mothers as teachers of truth, as nurturers of the future, and as figures of strength and integrity for their children.

In the character of Nsongo, close analysis reveals the mothering qualities underlying her sibling relationship to Lianja. Beyond this biological connection, beyond her continued companionship and advisor status, she fulfills the duties of a mother in the absence of Mbombe throughout the remainder of the narrative. She shares the qualities demonstrated by mothers within the text: wisdom, nurturing, insight, courage and an unassuming

power without use of force. As Lianja's sibling, she shares a special unity with him. Siblings of the womb, Lianja and Nsongo are born in full adult form, with Nsongo emerging directly after Lianja. He then takes her by the hand and they fly away to “inspect their father's country” (3.458-464). Although Nsongo was not mentioned as part of the prophecy, Mbombe, their mother, and the Mongo community accept her presence without question.

While his Spirit nature might elevate Lianja above identification with human suffering and loss, Nsongo forges a connection with aspects of corporeal and spiritual existence. Although she exhibits strength and bravery fighting alongside Lianja in the battle with the Sau-Sau, she is also moved by the experience of witnessing death. After Lianja kills the Chief Sau-Sau, “Nsongo, the hero's sister wept / Not with sadness at Chief Sau-Sau's murder / But with the shock she felt in her heart as a girl” (3.1156-1158). The text describes hers as an explicitly female reaction. What meaning does this have for a female consciousness in this text? Nsongo demonstrates sensitivity and heartache about death that Lianja either does not or cannot, perhaps because of his Spirit nature. It is not clear from the text what exactly prevents him from sharing this emotion with his sister, but he is moved by her own reaction, retreating “to a quiet place” where they are both addressed by a voice speaking from the skies. When this voice commends Lianja's actions and requests his next move be that of resurrecting the dead, Nsongo immediately urges him to do the voice's bidding:

'Lianja my brother
Why have you killed your brothers?
... We must love the Sau-Sau and the Fete-Fete
Lianja my brother,
please do what the voice has commanded you'
(3.1186-1191)

Nsongo echoes the sentiments of both her parents' convictions and teachings in her exhortation to her brother for this act of redemptive resurrection. Her influence on him affords him the possibilities of a human connection and continuity that he might not have accomplished as a lone male hero. The impact of her concerns and emotions on Lianja are reminiscent of the role of their mother. In essence, Nsongo co-mothers Lianja in the absence of Mbombe. Nsongo is the female and human counterpart to the male and Spirit form of Lianja, the other central figure in this epic. As a mother figure, she never considers abandoning him. Although he did not come from her womb in the biological sense of motherhood, they came from the same womb and are defined by that shared experience. The community accepts her presence without question, and the text itself documents her as his helpmate and counselor, as well as someone who offers a human connection that he cannot always cultivate on his own. When an artist creates a text about a male hero in a culture that upholds mothers as important and powerful political and spiritual figures, that male hero requires an intimate female influence that tempers his ego as a male and connects his Spirit nature with humanity. Nsongo wholly accepts her role as Lianja's sibling, co-mother, and companion without

thought or question because they are a part of each other.

Exactly the same qualities valued in the women depicted within the narrative are also evident in Ilele's character; in fact, these shared female qualities seem to contribute to others' admiration of him. Ilele is the child of a human and Spirit union, and is wholly accepted by the community as such. His insights make him a philosopher, teacher, historian, and minister to his people, who also elevate him because he fathers their hero. The text depicts Ilele as a sensitive, wise, and loving man who ponders human epistemology, relationships, and the debt of mankind to Ngiambe. The text uses his character to inform the reader (audience) about complexities of language and experience in this culture:

Ilele was not afraid of the realities of the world
For he knew that all people become mature through
experience
When old and matured by various experiences,
The Ancestors and the Spirits shall infuse them with
wisdom
From which is created the language of knowledge
That shall be the means of communication between
the living,
Their Ancestors, the Spirits and Ngiambe (1.1590-
1596)

Ilele faithfully accepts the reality of his people's shortcomings and idiosyncrasies, and the way their world works in conjunction with the cosmos of the Ancestors,

Spirits and Ngiambe. His acknowledgement of this special “language of knowledge” that results from divine infusion of wisdom indicates both the value the culture places on age-wisdom, as well as the wisdom of such a young person capable of recognizing this truth inherent within his culture. He displays further insight by considering the dangers of this language in the possession of people who are not divinely inspired or taught through experience, “This language, if acquired without knowledge and wisdom, / Is no longer a symbol of communication / It causes death without mercy” (1.1597-1602). Knowledge qualifies the use of language to influence and teach people. Ilele recognizes this and despite the admiration repeatedly given to Ilele by his community, he retains humility and wisdom in the presence of his elders and the Spirits. The qualities equating Ilele with formerly discussed female figures also make him a considerate and loving partner. Again, the community does not view this as a sign of weakness. When Mbombe obsesses over the nsafu fruit that eased her physical suffering, Ilele admonishes her (2.680-682) but, moved by her distress, he still goes in search of the fruit. His devotion suggests the worth of their relationship to the community in which it exists and is nurtured by.

Forgiveness, empathy, unity, and rebirth are themes of Ilele's vision as well as the vision shared by mother figures in the text. This suggests the promise of that vision for the past and present communities, not only of Mongo people, but, in the words of Ilele himself, for the entire human race. During his journey into this enemy territory, Ilele contemplates the united future of these

enemy communities in terms that might be eerily familiar:

We Mongo and the other tribes
...Must all forgive them
For they do not know what they are doing
...By our action and love, we shall create peace in this
cosmos
One day, all mankind shall be united
...The whole human race shall be reborn in a better
form
[emphasis added] (2.727-736)

Ilele's vision of unification for all of humanity coheres with the prophecy regarding the arrival of his son. His exhortations of forgiveness, understanding of the enemy, activism, love, peace, and unity reflect directly back on the female figures that are part of his past, present, and future. Mbombe and Nsongo contribute to this shared vision of unity as they prepare for and act in conjunction with the intents and purposes of the hero, Lianja. Ilele displays the qualities that he sought in his wife and mother of his child: generosity, wisdom, humility, and power (2.360-366). The community accepts and admires these qualities that he shares with the mother. In accordance with the concurrent portrayal of mothers as admirable figures, the artist of this text depicts a central male character as a sensitive and dual-natured man-spirit who has utmost regard for women as wives and mothers.

Like his father, Lianja possesses dual nature of spirit-human, but his sensitivity comes from external female influences. The inherent suggestion of the text is that

Lianja's double nature resides in dual gender identification as well as his status as human and spirit. This aspect of his characterization might also suggest that Nsongo represents his female identification and acts as an intercessor between Lianja's spirit nature and his ability to identify with humans. The majority of the epic's length devotes itself to anticipating the arrival of the male hero prophesied in the opening. The reader understands that this hero is a Spirit that will be born into human form. As his mother and the community prepare for Lianja's arrival, the text reminds the reader again of Lianja's "two natures" which we understand at this point to be Spirit and human. Lianja is a Spirit, which gives him the power to command his human mother's physicality and differentiate his entrance into the human cosmos. Mbombe greets them both: "Son Lianja and daughter Nsongo / This land of your father and forefathers welcomes you today," but acknowledges Lianja's mission as the savior of his people, "Lianja my son, the world has been awaiting your birth for many years..." (Ll.3.476-478). While the Mongo community expresses respect and deference to Lianja and his supernatural powers, Nsongo and Lianja treat each other with equal respect befitting womb-siblings. In their respective roles as "omo-iyá 7," or siblings of the same womb, Nsongo and Lianja demonstrate the qualities of "unconditional love, togetherness, unity, solidarity, and loyalty" ("Introduction" 9-10). Lianja's supernatural power exists separately from Nsongo, as evidenced by the evil spirits that fear only "the new-born boy" (3.699), and later when the text describes his complex combination of human and Spirit qualities:

Lianja was a different creature sent by Ngiambe
He was part human being, part spirit

...

He also possessed natural strength, boldness and
intelligence

He was very generous, but could also get annoyed
(3.902-911)

Lianja has both supernatural and human strengths. His human impatience is quite pronounced, as demonstrated by his frustration towards the Sau-Sau treatment of his father and his people. Throughout the remainder of the text and Mbombe's absence from the narrative, Nsongo remains with Lianja. In the end, he defers again to both their influence and importance to his character by taking them with him in his ascension into the Spirit cosmos. As a hero, Lianja's attitude toward motherhood, one of accountability, respect, and deference, reflects itself in his relationships with his mother and sister, and in the community that respects his role as a hero. He holds Mbombe accountable as a truthful teacher and nurturer to him in his capacity as her son and a spirit being. Nsongo provides him with a connection to humanity, his own, and the condition of the people for whom he is a unifier. This reverent attitude is finally displayed in his deference to these women, with whom he ascends into cosmos.

Mothers and siblings in *The Lianja Epic* exemplify the privileging and central role of motherhood within an African community. Matrifocal feminism emerges as theory in praxis within this epic, valuing and improving community considerations over individual autonomy. It

places female value within the cultural constructs of motherhood and other familial and communal relationships. From exploring the depiction and context of female characters in this text, one discovers that the role of the mother is inseparable from other relationships within this family and community structure. Being a mother or practicing and possessing mothering qualities suggest a multitude of roles in both familial and societal spheres of conduct, roles that are not necessarily specific to gender: wife, teacher, minister, philosopher, historian, and counselor.

Matrifocal feminism in a textual study reconsiders women's anatomy as a means for the unique opportunity of motherhood. Men do not have the privilege of unique experience and power simply because of genitalia differences. Matrifocal feminism proposes a means for rethinking anatomy, gender and social constructs in culture and text. Motherhood is an art form in this text: mothers have aesthetic appeal, didactic purpose, and provocative engagement. I proposed earlier that an artist creating this text must envision mothers as the ultimate source of truth and goodness within the range of human relationships and roles. Motherhood implies the possession of wisdom, power through a language of knowledge, and the ability to unite people and communities. It is accepted as a natural part of female experience and community, not just central to a familial unit. The community demands and receives accountability from mothers as teachers of truth, as nurturers of the future, and as figures of strength and integrity for their children. The role of mother is not limited to a biological condition or privilege; it is

extended within the family and community to men and women in the form of co-mothering.

The relationships between husbands and wives, mothers and children, and finally, siblings, demonstrate the transcendence of human love when it is grounded in an unselfish love for all of humanity. All of the characters discussed delineate the responsibility and gift of motherhood and co-mothering, as well as a supportive attitude toward the central role of motherhood, and the fostering beauty in relationships, since all relationships are matrifocal. Thus, this matrifocal, ideal feminist community has high expectations of its members, and in turn provides them with a nurturing, accepting society of members regardless of gender, race, and identity.

According to Chandra Mohanty, theory allows us to “understand race, class, gender, nation, sexuality, and colonialism...in terms of histories and experiences that tie us together;” (191) theory encourages the individual to engage in praxis of solidarity. Matrifocal feminism provides a viable intersection of theory and praxis shared across diverse communities. Its sociological basis allows for consideration of histories and experience. When used as a lens for reading *The Lianja Epic*, it allows the reader to discover a community centered on fostering solidarity within its members, where power lies not in force or violence, but, to quote the epic's quintessential figure of motherhood, in “dialogue, love, peace and reconciliation” (2.1052). Matrifocal feminism, emergent from African consciousness, contributes a culturally relevant method for understanding African community, politics, and literature.

Chapter 11

Fela Anikulapo Kuti

Oikelome, A.

BY the nineteen seventies, a unique popular musical typology emerged from the continent of Africa pioneered by Fela Anikulapo-Kuti. Afrobeat, Fela's musical synthesis from rhythm, jazz and highlife was defined by this fusion of foreign elements in a socio-stylistic musical framework whose roots are African traditional. Felá Anikulapo Kuti remained an enigma to his generation. Some said he was one of Africa's best musicians. To others he was a prophet. And to the governments that ruled in his time, he was an odious rebel. In all, Felá stood as an outspoken musician that employed his music as a weapon to propagate both political and social ideologies. His irresistible rhythms and instrumental composition were laid with originality that grew increasingly political and revolutionary in nature. Coker describes Fela as a brilliant artist:

He was able to establish an entirely new genre of resistance. He despised political corruption, and the persecution of the masses. Self-identifying as an artist of the people, he managed to upset the ruling class of his own society and to cast a spell of reform on the elites of other societies. (95-95)

Fela Anikulapo Kuti's music was unique in the sense that his fearless projection of anger released new creative possibilities. These resulted in his forceful, aggressive, socially and politically explosive lyrics.

Born in 1938 in Nigeria to a protestant preacher, Reverend I.O. Ransome-Kuti, and the activist, Mrs. Olufunmilayo Ransome Kuti, Fela manifested at an early stage not only his budding musical talent but also a tendency towards activism. His father was one of the founders of the Nigeria Union of Teachers (NUT) and a constant critic of the colonial government. He was also a prolific composer of religious hymns and was credited with being the author and composer of the Abéòkuta-Ègbá anthem. From all accounts, Felá's first introduction to the study of music was from his father whose strict discipline and authoritative personality did not slack in the area of music teaching. Felá excelled under his father's tutelage at his lessons in Western music and distinguished himself as a musician at an early age. He was occasionally being called upon to entertain his parents and their guests at the family piano by the time he was eight years old. By this time, Felá had also gained competence in the ability to play music from the written score. (Veal 28)

Fela's mother also had a strong influence on his life when he was growing up. She was a social and political activist, constantly fighting for the liberation of the disenfranchised women in a conservative, male dominated society. She founded the Abéòkuta Women Union in 1946 in response to the atrocities of the colonial government against market women, particularly in Abéòkuta¹. She was also highly involved in politics, travelling round the globe and aligning herself with International Women's Movements (Coker 11).

At the age of nineteen in August of 1958, Felá was able to convince his mother -his father had died in 1955- to go abroad to study music. With the help of his brother, Olukóyè Ransome-Kúti², he was able to secure admission at the Trinity College of music in London where he received trained on theoretical and practical aspects of Western music. He had a stint with highlife and jazz upon his return from Europe in 1964. The turning point in his musical career came in 1969 with a musical tour to America at the peak of the Nigerian civil war. There he met and fell in love with Sandra Smith, a Black Panther and civil rights activist who radically altered his political vision (Veal 69-72). This led to his embrace of Pan Africanism and change in musical direction using Afrobeat as a weapon of struggle and political emancipation. On his return from America, Fela released a hit album titled *London Scene* in 1970. By 1971 he had changed his band from "Nigeria 70" to "Africa 70" while his club Afrosport became Africa Shrine. By the time Fela released the chartbuster *Jeun K'oku* in 1972, his authority as king of Afrobeat was established.

The development of Afrobeat of Felá Aníkúlápò Kúti can be grouped under four artistic periods. The first period was his early experience with highlife in the early 60's (1964-1969) when the foundation of Afrobeat style was laid. The stylistic element in Fela's song during this period can be further divided into three stages. The earliest lyrics conformed to the highlife conventions while introducing a number of foreign vocal elements in jazz. The middle period gradually reflect the growing influences of rhythm and blues and Afro-Latin styles, particularly Cuban music. The later period, composed when African-American rhythm and blues had become the dominant popular style saw Fela attempting a more explicit fusion of highlife and rhythmic blues.

The second period was in the 1970s when his music was at its apogee. At this time, his ideological stance had taken shape and become sufficiently concretised for him to successfully fuse an equally new musical vision with political commitment (1970-1976). The stylistic development of Afrobeat during this period was a radical departure from the norm at that time. A major stylistic development at this period was his decision to use Pidgin English in singing in 1972. This made him very popular among the large audience and enabled Fela to dart in and around the rhythm in a strongly jazz fashion, bending the stresses and accent of Pidgin English to African syntax and tonal inflections (Olaniyan 94).

The third period was the post 1976 confrontation with the military. This so engaged him at a point that dealing with the military became the primary goal of his artistic expression (1977-1989). The structure of Afrobeat remained, but with a new stylistic approach to composing

both songs and instruments. His lyrics during this period focused on issues of injustice, corruption and the abuse of power. Some songs were written to condemn oppressive governments, fight oppressive regimes and pass on messages that many dared to pass across. A major innovation to the vocal line was the introduction of extended passages to the chorus and the integration of choral lines into the horn arrangements. Another major stylistic trend in the music of the period is the fact that they were rather lengthy.

The final period was the re-ordering of his tunes into more of 'yabis'3 and chants (1990-1997). The mood of the music was more sober and reflective. The harmony of his music also started moving into polytonality with horn lines, rhythmic patterns, and choral singing often based around different tonal centres.

The First Artistic Period

-1964-1969

The Second Artistic Period

-1970-1976

The Third Artistic Period

-1977-1989

The Fourth Artistic Period

-1990-1997

Linguistics of Afrobeat Lyrics

The lyrics of Afrobeat consist of three languages namely, the Standard English, Nigerian Pidgin and Yorùbá language. However, the Pidgin is the most dominant of the three. The Pidgin is a language of mass

appeal. It is the language of the down trodden. According to Coker, Felá wanted a language he could use to carry the people along and he found the pidgin language a ready tool (47). The use of Pidgin is quite significant in the sense that his unique dry sarcasm comes alive in this language which ordinary people can understand and identify with. Pidgin slogans in Afrobeat were thus able to appeal to the feelings and emotions of the Nigerian populace (41). A common characteristic of Pidgin techniques found in Felá's lyrics is the use of repetitions, reduplication of words and code mixing. Repetition of lines and phrases is a common aspect of Afrobeat lyrics. This device is a significant feature of African songs used for a hypnotic, musical effect. Even though it is often considered as an element of redundancy, repetition takes on an additional meaning in Felá's lyrics. An initial analysis of the lyrics reveals that when, for example, a sentence is stated and repeated, there are temporary factors that introduce a distinguishing mark between the initial statements and its repetitions. The initial appearance will carry with it some degree of newness. Such newness is also subsequently altered when the sentence is repeated. However, in Afrobeat lyrics, the music is varied with each stanzas, lines or sections. Variation often occurs in the solo section thus providing a unifying element with the repetitions in the chorus section. This is seen in the example below taken from *Zombie*:

Solo: Zombie o, Zombie

Chorus: Zombie o, Zombie

Solo: Zombie o, Zombie

Chorus: Zombie o, Zombie

Solo: Zombie no go go, unless you tell am to go

Chorus: Zombie

Solo: Zombie no go stop, unless you tell am to stop

Chorus: Zombie

Solo: Zombie no go turn, unless you tell am to turn

Chorus: Zombie ...

Reduplication is a significant morphological process which involves extension of words without a change in their meaning. We find much reduplication of words in songs like Original sufferhead with words like “big-big”, “ten-ten”, “so-so”, “thief-thief”:

Na so-so energy for Africa...

Na the big-big men dey get electric

...

If them no get electric dem go...

Fagbohun states that code mixing consists in mixing two or more languages together in the same utterances (24). In this context, we have the mixing of Yorùbá, English, and Pidgin English. An example is in Original Suffer Head:

It's time for Jèfà-head O

I want to tell you my brother one bitter truth

Before we all are to Jèfà-head o

We must be ready to fight for am now

In the example cited above, Felá uses Standard English in line 2. On the other hand, he uses Pidgin

English in line 4 and a Yorùbá coinage (Jèfà) in lines three and one. Jèfà is a derived word appearing as an intransitive verb which means to enjoy good fortune. Another feature of code mixing manifest in Felá's music is the use of loan words from other languages other than the Yorùbá language. The lyrics in *Beast of No Nation* reveal the use of both the use of Yorùbá and Urhobo language at the end of the music “Egbékégbé”⁴ is a Yorùbá word while “oturugbeke” is an Urhobo word that functions as an exclamation:

Beast of no nation – egbékégbé
Beast of no nation – oturugbeke

One major characteristic of Felá's lyrics is the fusion of other words from across the continent of Africa. This was made possible through the creation of a micro African cosmopolite called the “Kalakuta Republic”. This is in the sense that Felá housed many people from different parts of Africa. It was therefore easy to get many vocabularies across the continent that he used in his lyrics. Examples of loan words from other countries are found in *Kalakuta Show*. Kalakuta is a Swahili word that means “rascal” (Coker 41). The Swahili language is spoken mainly along the Eastern and Southern parts of Africa. Below are excerpts:

Kalakuta Show (2x)
Babu wire dem-o cut
Look fence dem break
Look gate dem fall
Everybody dey run

Look head dem break
Look blood him dey flow
Kalakuta show o-o
Kalakuta show

A common feature of Afrobeat lyrics is the use of figurative languages. The following figures of speech identifiable in the lyrics are alliteration, anaphora, personification and hyperbole. Apart from being artistic and poetic devices, these figures of speech help in creating pleasurable effects that are necessary in the comfortable and easy repetition, recollection and involuntary evocation of the text (Avorgbedor 1989). For instance, the alliteration is found in International Thief Thief with the words, “Start, start them corruption” while the anaphora is found in Beast of No Nation with the phrase “Overtake done overtake overtake” being repeated at the beginning of neighboring clauses. Felá is most efficient in the use of synonymous parallelism for thematic clarity. In the example from Beast of No Nation, he creates variety, emphasis and rhetorical balance by means of significant change in the second line:

demonstration of craze
Crazy demonstration

The example above also features anastrophic patterns, created by the rephrasing of the second parallel lines. By the omission of the verb in line 1, he commonly prunes the second of two parallel lines, making the theme tense and emphatic.

In another development, Felá creates the same effect through a change in grammatical mood, as in the change from optative mood to imperative mood as seen in lines 3 and 5 from *Perambulator*:

Those colonial schools from that London
I'm telling you now, na we open dem eyes
We open dem eyes
Na we teach dem how to do plenty things
I say we teach dem plenty things

Felá also makes use of personifications to address inanimate objects like “Muslim” and “Colomentality” as if they were present. Other figures of speech replete in his lyrics include similes, oxymorons, zoomorphisms, paradoxes and allegories. Felá's creative ingenuity in the coinage of language is what Olaniyan calls charming pedestrianism (87). These are words that do not belong to any particular language, and words whose meaning may not be immediately intelligible but arise from Felá's creative treatment of language. In an interview with Oroh, Felá remarked:

...I make common words in the streets popular through my records...When I want to write lyrics, I think about my environment, I think about catchy words, words that can easily be identified with society...that is why they are successful. (22)

As a testament to the popularity and far reaching effect of his music, these terms, once introduced in the context of Felá's music, take on identities within the Nigerian

social context. Subsequently, these words have passed in to every day language of the man on the streets. An exclamatory word like “Ayakata” (Beast of No Nation) is an example:

Ò'fèsé-lù – aya-kata

Ò'fèsé - g'ba – aya-kata

Ò'fèsé -woh – aya-kata

Ò'fèsé -weng – aya kata

The word “Ayakata” is a nonsensical Yorùbá word. It is now used to denote a fall. Another nonsensical word is “Kere keke ji keke”, used at the beginning of the music Teacher Don't Teach me Nonsense. According to Yínnúsà Akínníbòsún⁵, Felá coined the word from the first name of his organist Kéjì Hamilton¹. This is done by the solo and the chorus in a call and response format:

Ke-re-ke- ji- ke-ke – (Chorus) - Yah

Ke- ji- ke-ke – (Chorus)- Yah

Ke-re-ke-ke- ji- ke-ke ...

A major innovation in Afrobeat is the alteration of standard acronyms into novel utterances. In the analysis we see Felá attempting to taint in the negative such references that appeared to reinforce institutional concepts once cloaked in positive registers. Others pertain to his vision of African humanism. This is shown in order below:

Acronym

A.S.B.O.P - Akunakuna, Senior Brother of Perambulator
B.B.C - Big Blind Country
B.O.N.N. - Beast of No Nation
C.B.B - Confusion Break Bone
C.O.P - Country of Pain
C.R.F.J.J - Clear Road for Jagajaga
C.SA.A - Condom Stalawagy and Scatter
G.O.C - Government of Crooks
I.T.T - International Thief Thief
J.J.D - Johnny Just Drop
M.A.S.S - Movement Against Second Slavery
M.O.P - Movement of the People
N.N.G - Nigerian Natural Gas
O.D.O.O - Overtake Don Overtake Overtake
S.A.P - Suck African people
U.S - Underground system
V.I.P - Vagabonds in Power

Afrobeat lyrics are full of proverbial sayings and riddles that express a shrewd perception of life and rooted in folklore traditions. Felá's songs contain two types of textual manipulation as far as the use of proverbs is concerned. He quotes or creates his own proverbs, and he elaborates upon them, thus creating an amalgam of proverbial sayings. The other technique is to quote a series of proverbs that are already in use. Endless examples can be cited. However two texts chosen to illustrate these linguistic manipulations and proliferations are Unnecessary Begging and Fefe ne fe. In Unnecessary Begging, Felá made use of an idiomatic expression to

describe the dichotomy between the poor (monkey) and the rich (baboon) in Africa:

Everyday, everyday, I dey hungry
Everyday, everyday, no house to stay
Monkey dey work, baboon dey chop
Baboon dey hold the key of store
Monkey dey cry, baboon dey laugh
The day monkey eye come open now
Baboon dey vex
Monkey refuse to work
Baboon dey vex and craze
Then he start to beg and beg
Unnecessary begging, as we dey call am
for area..

Fefe ne fe is an Ashanti proverb from Ghana used to satirise an African woman's carriage when she runs:

Fe fe na e ye fe.
Nti na o baa tu mmirika a
osuo ne nufu mu
Na e nnye se e b ete ato ntia

Afrobeat in the 21st Century

Fela Anikulapo Kuti had more than eighty albums containing about one hundred and fifty songs with lyrics based on political, sociological and satirical themes. Felá was not new to the political terrain because at one point in his life, he was also a politician. In 1979 his political party Movement of the People was not registered by the

Federal Elections Commission. However, Fela had studied the political terrain in Nigeria and came to the conclusion that there was no way Nigeria could ever conduct a free and fair election. This is found in the songs “Army Arrangement” and “Teacher”:

Pidgin English

Election story nko?
Obasanjo plan am very well
The same old politicians wey rule
Nigeria before
Obasanjo carry all of them
All of them dey there now
Few people dey fighti for bigi money
And the rest dey hungiry
Na wayo governmenti we dey o
E gba mi o
Na arangi man government we dey o
Ye paripa o
Na padi padi government we dey
E gba mi o
Bigi money, padipadi
Arrangi ni, wayo wayo
Add am together give me the answer
army arrangement.

The album *Army Arrangement* released in 1985 revealed the mismanagement of the economy by the past regimes in Nigeria and exposed their methods of stealing, among others. It showed that nothing good could come out of the then civilian rule peopled by the "same old

politicians (in the UPN, NPN, PRP & GNPP) who ruled and spoiled Nigeria before". According to Ogunde, the album revealed the inherent class links between the military Generals and the civilian wing (so called 'political class') of the ruling capitalist class (3).

The problem of rigging continues to bedevil the Nigerian political scene. The last election conducted in 2007 was plagued by massive riggings and irregularities - a situation that attracted both local and international criticisms. The number of election results that have since been annulled by the election tribunals all over the country is a proof of the fact that all is still not well with the electioneering process.

On the international scene, Felá condemned the brutality of oppressive regimes world wide. In *Beast of No Nation*, he lambasted world leaders like Margaret Thatcher of Britain and Ronald Reagan of the United States of America for the support given to the Apartheid South African regime under P. W. Botha:

Pidgin English

dey wan to make us sing about prison
dey wan to know about prison life
Felá, wetin you go sing about?
I dey, for prison, I call am "inside world"
the time weh I dey outside prison,
I call am "outside world"
na craze world, na be outside world

He further addressed the hypocrisy of world leaders on the subject of human rights claiming the futility of the

deliberations of the United Nations on the question of Human Rights in Third World countries. He insisted that “Human Rights” was no commodity for bargaining on the floor of the assembly:

Pidgin English

Dem go hold meeting,
Dem go start yab human beings
Animal talk don start again
Dash dem Human Rights
Animals wan dash us Human Rights
Animals can't dash me
Human Rights
I beg you, make you hear me well well
Human Rights na my property
You can't dash me my property

The case is no different today from what it was during Felá's time. The United Nations is still battling countries with Human Rights abuses evident in war and deprivations. The war in Sudan, East Timor, Iraq and the Middle East have defied solutions and according to Fela, the situation will continue to go from bad to worse until the world powers realise the fact that Human Rights is the exclusive right of every man. This also confirms the words of Felá that the United Nations are in fact “disunited”. Afrobeat also contains confrontational political lyrics targeted at the ruling class and the government. In the lyrics on “Government of Crooks”, Fela indicted the Nigerian government for colluding with foreign oil companies to exploit Ogoniland. He also

lamented the environmental hazards from oil spillage and canvassed for equity and fairness in the share of the oil revenue in favour of the people of the Niger Delta region:

Pidgin English

All of us know our country
Plenty plenty oil e dey.
Plenty things wey dey for Africa.
Petroleum is one of them
All di places that get the oil O.
Now pollution dey for the place O.
All the farm don soak with oil.
All the villages don catch disease.

In present dispensation, the clamour for justice on the issue of oil has led to civil unrest in the Niger Delta region. The foreign oil workers are daily being attacked by the Niger Delta militants with a new dimension of hostage taking being added to the scenario.

A major problem facing Africa today and expressed in Afrobeat lyrics is corruption. Corruption is still endemic in all government and private establishments. It has manifested itself in different areas of political, economic, social and educational activities (Hunge and Kelani 9). For Otile, it the perversion of integrity or state of affairs through bribery, favour, or moral depravity (78): the use of public office for private gain. Lipset and Lenz see corruption as the efforts to secure wealth or power through illegal means-private gain at public expense; or a misuse of public power for private benefit (14). Furthermore, the consequences of corruption include

uncertainty in the economy, rising costs of living, as well as inability to provide social amenities and imposition of regressive tax (23). It is a vicious circle.

In "Teacher Don't Teach Me Nonsense" Fela discusses the political chaos resulting from bad governance which includes corruption:

Pidgin English

Let us face ourselves for Africa
Na all the problems of this world.
In we dey carry, for Africa
Problems of inflation
Problems of corruption
Of mismanagement
Stealing by government
All over Africa

The increasing outcry of the public over market theft and series of widely publicized cases of official embezzlement brought about the composition of "Authority Stealing". He condemns the corrupt officials as real criminals deserving of a fate worse than that reserved for the armed robbers. These excerpts offer an excellent example of his traditional use of irony and analogy:

Pidgin English

Authority People, dem go dey steal
Public contribute plenty money
Na him authority him go dey steal

Authority man no dey pickpocket
Na petty cash him go dey pick

Armed robber, him need gun
Authority man, him need pen
Authority man in charge of money
Him no need gun, him need pen

The problem of corruption has eaten deep into the fabric of the Nigerian system. The war against corruption has led to the setting up of various agencies such as the economic and financial crime commission (EFCC) and the Independent Commission on Corrupt Practices (ICPC). However, the government continues to rot in the mire of corruption and mismanagement with billions of Naira being carted away and stored in private accounts of Nigerian leaders overseas. The probes in the sectors during Obasanjo's civilian regime are proofs of the huge fraud and embezzlement in high places. The revelations of the level of “authority stealing” in the oil, power, energy and transport sector reveals the extent to which these practices have been institutionalised in the high places. The current probe of past governors and their wives is further proof of this. What remains of these probes is yet to be seen by the waiting masses. Fela mirrored the travails of the society in many of the songs. In *Original Sufferhead*, a work done in the 80's, he expressed the paradox of living in the midst of plenty and yet languishing in penury and poverty:

Pidgin English

plenty plenty water for Africa
Na so-so water in Africa
Water for man to drink nko-o
E-no dey
Plenty, plenty light for Afrika
Na so-so energy for Africa
Ordinary light for man nko O
E-no dey
Plenty, plenty food for Africa
Na so-so plenty food for Africa
Ordinary food for man for chop nko O
E-no dey

In *Suffering and Smiling*, Fela expresses the poor state of the masses and the poor transportation system (“people packed inside buses like sardines”), appalling housing scheme (“ten people sleep inside one small room”) and how amenities (water, food and light) were lacking or grossly inadequate. He then linked these to the cynical nomenclature of underdeveloped nations. Successive governments since the 80's have not been able to solve the problem of shelter, food and light. Felá tagged the United Nation's Programme for “Food, House, Health etc. for all by the year 2000” as a programme of deceit. Till 2009 most Third World countries are yet to benefit from the set programme. Felá hated class distinction and used his music to condemn it in the society. In “Suffer Suffer” he described a clear class oppression of the working class in direct opposition to the privileges enjoyed by leading clergy and prominent adherents:

Pidgin English

Suffer, suffer for world; enjoy for heaven

Christians go dey yab: "In spiritum
heavinus"

Muslims go dey call: "Allahu Akuba"

Open your eyes everywhere

Archbishop na miliki

Pope na enjoyment,

imam na gbáládùn

In a documentary interview with Stephane Tchall-Gadjieff, Felá posited that Christianity and Islam are only artificial religions meant to extort the poor and gullible. All Christians think like English men and all Muslims think like Arabs – a ploy to divert the people from their roots. He further canvassed for a return to African Traditional Religion as a way out of religious bigotry. This is in line with Karl Marx's theory which took a dim view of religious faith, calling it "the opium of the masses" in his writings (qtd. in Colton 1). The case is not different from what we see today among religious leaders. The proliferation of churches and mosques in the country shows the extent to which Nigerians can be very religious. We now have churches building cities and kingdoms from the coffers of the members. Fela's definition of corruption is apocalyptic. This is what Olaniyan termed Fela's way of using the language that is not common to people but yet applied in such a way that people find it amusing. Fela defined corruption as Authority Stealing, Army Arrangement, Chop and Clean mouth as if nothing has happened, Vagabonds in Power,

Chop and Quench, Open and Close etc. Since his songs were targeted at corrupt leaders, he delighted in exposing the evils they perpetuated while in power. Another dimension in Fela's lyrics is that of soothsaying. According to James, Fela's lyrics full of many predictions that eventually came to pass. A few of them was the prediction of the fall of the military state in "Army Arrangement".

From the foregoing discourse, it is evident that Fela's lyrics are still relevant to present day situations. This implies that not much has changed over the years. In Nigeria, corruption has eaten deep into the fiscal discipline of the nation. The economic situation in Nigeria has taken a downward trend as a result of mismanagement of national resources by the leaders. When Fela's songs are played in present dispensation, all the issues discussed still remain true as if the songs were composed recently. Recently government has made a few efforts to fight corruption. The dismissal of Professor Fabian Osuji as educational minister over economic fraud in the educational sector in 2006, the impeachment of Olubunmi Ete6 over economic scandal in 2007, the numerous probes of financial impropriety in various sectors, the trial of past governors over financial misconduct and the current trial of Professor Grange and Senator Iyabo Obasanjo-Bello over misappropriation of Health funds appear as steps in the right direction. The problem with these probes is in the implementation of the findings. If the desired change is to come, then policy makers should take an informed look at some lyrics of Felá which bother on governance and societal ills.

Fela was first among peers who argued that there is the need to create more jobs in Nigeria to cater for the massive unemployed youths. Workers welfare should be enhanced with adequate provision of shelter, sound health and mortgage facilities with adequate retirement packages. The ill-gotten wealth of Nigerian public office holders and properties corruptly acquired should be confiscated or nationalised. Provision of such basic infrastructure as light, food, water, transport and security to enhance the living conditions of Nigerian populace is urgent and imperative.

Chapter 12

Archetypes for Enekwe

Schneider, C

BARBARA Melosh in her book *Gender and American History Since 1890* posits that “gender” is socially constructed. Her classic example comes from Nineteenth-century Victorian culture which she notes,

described sexual difference in terms of the duties and obligations that followed from men's and women's inherent characteristics. Women's moral superiority made them ideal wives and mothers, charged with the solemn responsibility of guiding errant children and men. (“Introduction” 7)

Many socially constructed notions have been perpetuated through the literary works and philosophies of many societies. Elaine Showalter in her paper “Towards a Feminist Poetics” is of the opinion that when we study “stereotypes of women, the sexism of male critics”, and the “limited roles” women play in literary

history, “we are not learning what women have felt and experienced, but what men have thought women should be” (34-36). Hence recent Feminist interest in literary criticism is directed at exposing how ideas of gender and gender relationships are constructed and transmitted through literary works. This paper assesses how Onuora Enekwe's portrayal of women pander to archetypal inscriptions of women as either mother (the Madonna) or destroyer (la femme fatale) – masculinist portraitures which aid in entrenching contestable notions and myths of male superiority and female inferiority. In contesting phallogocentric systems of thought and dismantling logocentricism, Feminist criticism challenges Masculinist female (mis)perceptions and (mis)presentations while simultaneously deconstructing patriarchal “systems of thought which legitimize themselves by reference to some presence or point of authority prior to and outside of themselves” (Hawthorn 130).

The image and personality of women in Enekwe's oeuvres easily come across with a critical view of some poems in Enekwe's three collections – *Broken Pots* (published in 1977), *Marching to Kilimanjaro* (published in 2005) and *Gentle Birds Come to me* (published in 2007). These supposedly evidence the poet's concern for women and their well being. However the poet perceives and subsequently inscribes women as what Selden and Widdowson term “beings of subjectivity” (189). Throughout Enekwe's poetry, two major archetypes are purveyed of women: Women as destroyers, the femme fatale, and women as mothers, the madonna-child. In much of poetry as in other genres, literary archetypes, being “recurrent narrative designs, patterns of action,

character types or images identifiable in a wide variety of works of literature as well as myths”, are usually held to reflect “a set of universal, primitive and elemental mental forms or patterns whose effective embodiment in a literary work evokes a profound response from the reader” (Abrams 224). In thus appraising and challenging some feminine archetypes in Enekwe's poetry it will be seen that readers may have been misled into holding erroneous conjectures that subtly impact upon their assessment of womanhood. Instances of such misplacement are obvious from Enekwe's deliberate contortions which serve to undermine femaleness and perpetuate the stereotype of her as a being of simple qualities. No doubt both ideas are borne out of male phallocentric and masculinist attempts to culturally dominate and relegate women to subservient positions the world over.

The Femme Fatale

In discussing archetypal femme fatale images constructed in Enekwe's poetry, we turn to the poems “Lady Death” (Broken Pots) and “Prayer for Peace” (Marching to Kilimamjaro) as examples. Although both poems are published in different anthologies by Enekwe – in fact, the latter is published twenty eight years after the former – yet we see the poet exploring the same notion of women in both poems.

In “Lady Death” the destructive woman of Shaw's imagining is reflected through the image of a female praying mantis whose actions are reported by the male “voice”. It begins with a sarcastic comment on the idea of

love between man and woman: “Love can be a dangerous game” he observes. Where or how this danger originates is not clear. The next line never takes us to any *raison d’être* for this overture between man and woman in love (referred to here as “Mantis” and “his lady”). By refusing to provide some explanatory details which the signposts of “love game” suggests, the poet insults our intelligence. However, what follows is even more disturbing as the poetic voice describes a macabre “love” and “death” dance:

in the region of terrible heat
she clasps him within her thighs
ensconces his head between her teeth
and with the swiftness of guillotine blade
chops it off... (Pots 30)

Now we are provided the persona’s own simplistic, if not prosaic, explanation for the murderous instinct of the female species:

so the dance can endure
without remorse or wasteful introspection. (30)

No doubt this succeeds more in establishing the wickedness of the perpetrator of the action rather than explicating the situations that give rise to it. By this Enekwe condemns the woman for heinous crimes and sentences her to states of criminality, irrationality and stupidity. It is similar to Jane Tompkins’s observations in the movie *Gunfight at the OK Corral* where two

characters Doc Halliday and Jo Van Fleet star as degraded characters. Tompkins remarks that

Doc Holliday is a similarly degraded character. He used to be a dentist and is now a gambler, who lives to get other people's money away from them; he is a drunk, and he abuses the woman that loves him. But his weaknesses, in the perspective of the movie, are glamorous. He is irresistible, charming, seductive, handsome, witty, commanding. ... The degradation doesn't stick to (him) ... it is all absorbed by his female counterpart, the 'slut', Jo Van Fleet. ("Shadow" 136)

This chauvinistic portrayal of woman as seen above, and which Enekwe attempts in his poetry, serves to undermine the integrity of women as rational beings while simultaneously establishing them as extremely selfish and self serving species with killer instincts. Hence like the projection of Jo Van Fleet in the movie, any time we encounter Enekwe's archetypal "women" "we are embarrassed every time she appears on the screen, because every time, she is humiliated further" (136). Such notions of female irrationality and invisibility as offered by Enekwe in his poetry find explication in the Nigerian critic's expose about women of Yoruba whose culture has made it such that:

women are 'naturally' excluded from public affairs; they are viewed as unable to hold positions of responsibility, rule men or even be visible when serious matters of state and society are being discussed. Women

are viewed to need tutelage before they can be politically active...” (Ogundipe-Leslie 130)

Further in the poem “Prayer for Peace” Enekwe's recourse to his cherished masculinist theme is done with a touch of irony where men are presented as innocent victims (and acolytes) at the “altar” of feminine abuse. Hence they resort to 'prayer' to deflect the evil of femininity. Once again, the subject matter here, sex, is seen to wield a disastrous outcome on humanity. Employing a Hellenistic metaphor (Troy), Enekwe evokes scenes of destruction and disaster unleashed on “bewildered children crying to heaven” and wretched “widow(s) in black” who join the “funeral train” to the place of burials. The cause for such grand destruction, we are told, lies in the mythical powers of the sexual organ, as symbolized by the “lifted thigh.” Here female sexuality is misprised as wreaking only havoc and destructive violence on man. The “thigh” is of quasi religious power and significance and as such becomes an image and instrument of disaster.

your lifted thigh
deflects the planets
disturbs the seas
floods farmlands. (31)

The woman's ability to destroy man throughout the ages, as the poem suggests, is entrenched in her sexuality which the poet vulgarizes as

...the corrosive liquid of passion,
the pulverization of flesh
in the intensity of copulation. (31)

This supposed power of woman over man can only be calmed with prayers, ubiquitous sacrifices and supplications as suggested in the last stanza of the poem:

Queen of fire
be steady and calm
...
open to peace the gates of the city. (32)

Here the poet entrenches the notion of male rational balance by resorting to the myth of an opposing irrational female power. The poet's dilemma here is similar to that posed by Bishop's "The Fish" which Patricia Yaeger rationalizes as dilemma of killing "the object" in order to "assert the subject." As she comments,

the question in other words, is how one writes poetry about an "other" who has an extra-human power the self thinks it needs, without destroying that other's alienness. Should the poet kill the fish, eat him, absorb him? If she refuses she may relinquish the possibility of internalizing this venerability and relinquish as well the enactment of a ritual moment of empowerment, of making herself greater than she was before by absorbing his tremendum. ("Sublime" 195)

However Enekwe, unlike Bishop, does not have to kill his "Helen" physically in order to internalize her

“tremendum.” He redirects his quest into quasi religious realms where ultimately the object (woman) is supposedly conquered (calmed) by her worshipping acolytes. Thus, it is still a woeful tale of subjugation and abuse, cleverly crafted in lyrics of admiring denouncements prior to the final conquest. Hence under thorough investigation, such powers as suggested by the poet (all lost in mists of myths) do not actually exist.

The Madonna

This is one other portraiture of woman in Enekwe's poetry using the Madonna image where women are only seen and heard through her power and ability to nurture and protect their children. It is ubiquitously sustained in poetry of Africa of pre-independence and postcolonial periods by Diop and Senghor. The archetypal mother-and-child is readable in the following poems of Enekwe: “To Mother on her birthday” (Broken Pots), “Black woman” (Marching to Kilimanjaro), “That I could Fly” and “Nneka” (Gentle Birds Come to me).

In “To Mother on her Birthday,” Enekwe begins his stereotype of woman as nurturing symbol, self sacrificing and long suffering. In the first stanza, the poet seeks to establish the reason for this relationship:

... you did more
than bring us into the world
and let us suck life
from your nipples. (11)

Maternal duty is offered as the *raison d'être* for the survival of feminine identity. Here she is stable and self-sacrificing. Maternal love is “a love that thrives like Iroko” (Pots 12) in its all embracing nature. Mother's voice is “beautiful as dawn” and “...sweet as songs woven by black birds among sunflowers” (Gentle 38) because she “nurtured and tended” her children. Her tender care gives the suckling baby

sweet sensations (that) rises in pressure
Tiny legs kick with pleasure
Sleep comes gently and strong
Sleep whispers softly and long. (9)

Her self-sacrificing nature is observed through her understanding that

... to love her baby
is to bathe her and wipe
her nostrils, mouth and rump. (“Mother” Pot 12)

As Mother she knows it is her duty to caution and sympathize:

My child, you may rove
to discover the world
but do not follow everything
that pleases your eyes. (“Fly” Gentle 38)

And for the poet, as for Okonkwo's uncle in the classic African novel *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe, “Mother is supreme.”

Outside of these roles the mothering woman does not have an identity of her own. As Tompkins opines, women are “used as extensions of men, mirrors of men, devices for showing men off, devices for helping men get what they want. They are never there in their own right, or rarely....” (“Shadows” 136). In this instance, as Enekwe suggests in his poems, women get recognized as a result of their role as mothers. Once this dubious stamp is removed or deflated, we may assume that the woman ceases to exist. To Enekwe, the ideal woman is a symbol of nurture (or perhaps self-torture and self-annihilation) which the poet mischievously equates with succor, endurance, self-sacrifice, patience, tolerance, wisdom, hard work and suffering. This steadfast love and stoicism of a suffering woman is likened to Africa which the poet refers to as “Queen of perpetual smile /and gentle, flowing sadness” and one whose “warm breasts/ light the corridors of life” (Kilimanjaro 29)

In line with this image of African womanhood fostered in the tradition of leading Francophone poets like Leopold Senghor, Africa was to endure and forgive its colonial rape and degradation and moreover is expected to continue this endurance with long suffering platitudes such as Enekwe offers. But as Mariama Ba opines, “we no longer accept the nostalgic praise to the African mother who, in his anxiety, man confuses with mother Africa.” (qtd.in Schipper 47). Obviously Enekwe's perception of womanhood betrays this element of anxiety that Ba had suggested. Thus there is need for cultural sterilization which will overhaul such idealization and romanticisation of African womanhood because as Florence Stratton observes “through the

Mother Africa trope, they (men) mask the subordination of women in the patriarchal socio-political systems of African states from which they do, indeed, need to be liberated.” (55). There is also need to project women in all entirety as literary subjects with complexities that men are endowed with. As Patricia Waugh opines of this subjectivization,

once women have experienced themselves as 'subjects' then they can begin to problematize and to deconstruct the socially constructed subject positions available to them, and to recognize that an inversion of the valuation of 'maleness' and 'femaleness' will not in itself undermine the social construction of masculinity and femininity. (25)

Eneke's projection of these feminine archetypes only succeeds in perpetuating myths that subjugate and undermine womanhood. However as has been attempted by Chinua Achebe and Ngugi wa Thiong'o in their more recent works, there is indeed need for male writers to overhaul the limited portraiture of their women and womanhood so as to reconstruct more positive visioning of womanhood in the literature of modern Africa.

Chapter 13

Cean Dialogues

Emezue, GMT

I

WHILE modern African writers ponder the crises and upheavals in their world, particularly the inane spate of violence and poverty on the continent, Eco-critics in Europe and America insistently draw attention to the necessity of reassessing relationships between humans and nature as a *sine qua non* for peaceful coexistence of life on the planet, arguing, as Dean does on *ASLE* forum, that our “environmental (natural, human, and social) crises” are results of our disconnection from nature, brought about by increasing technology and our drifts into particularization: “a mentality of specialization that fails to recognize the interconnectedness of all things.” This interconnectedness or “interdependency from which emerges a singleness or unity” as Ce himself avers (168) evidently aligns with Schlenz’s premise in “Toward an Ecology of Literary Criticism” that we live in an “inescapably social and material world in which issues of race, class and gender inevitably intersect in complex and

multi-faceted ways with issues of natural resource exploitation and conservation” and, inevitably, of human preservation.

If one extends these disconnections to contemporary ‘democratic’ dictatorships, ethnicity, poverty and dependence on external aids, amongst other problems of post- or neo-colonial Africa, one is tempted to go the whole mile with Glofelty whose submission “What is Ecocriticism?” argues that indeed “human culture is connected to the physical (environment), affecting it and affected by it.” Thus from a heritage premised on violence and predation since centuries of Western domination, it becomes imperative to review Africa’s present dilemmas, these symptoms of the violence that “ravaged colonial peoples...for centuries-endured summary justice, unending economic oppression [and] distortion of their social and intimate lives” (Said 351), as inexorably rooted in the failure of manipulation of natural environment.

In heroic imagination, such “transgressions”¹ against the environment, whether borne from ‘hubristic’ acts, like King Lear’s parcelling of lands to his daughters, or from deeply hidden fears, as in Okonkwo’s persistent breach of earth rules, instigate the ultimate fall of heroes. Interestingly, Africa’s own records of heinous transgressions against the environment are legion. The arrogance and narcissism of human species, laid bare in the greed that characterised the imperialist impulse in Berlin to “slice up and parcel her out” to European powers, had developed what Kroker and Cook presently envision as a post-modern “dead space which will be marked by increasing and random outbursts of political

violence, schizoid behaviour and the implosion of all signs of communication as Western culture runs down toward the brilliant illumination of a final burn out” (xvii). On their part Africa still remains in complete disequilibrium, an “alien environment” where “its very alien quality beckons forth our creative impulses to make substitutive fictive worlds” (Butler 166).

Fortunately contemporary third and fourth generation poets in Nigeria² from Okigbo and Chinweizu, to Aiyejina, Osundare, Ushie and Ce, to mention but six, have since taken the onus of expending “tremendously energetic efforts” to testify to “the diversity and differences of the non-European world, and to its own agendas, priorities and history” (359). Their testimonies re-inscribe, reinterpret, and expand the areas of engagement as well as terrains in contest from Europe and America to Africa and the world as well.

African literatures (written or oral) have responded to social reality, moulding it, and being moulded also by it. Senghor, as quoted in Noble, was probably the first to articulate the unique position of art in Africa as “social” while noting that “the African assimilates beauty to goodness, and especially to effectiveness... the beautiful poem (being) the one which awakens the desired emotions in the public: sadness, joy, hilarity, terror” (92). It necessitates from an ancient premise of the creative artist as a “mediator,” and one whose “creative essence may be disturbed enough by the ill-health of humanity to ignite his genius “for a creation that will better the human condition, improve man’s understanding of human destiny, and help evolve a better quality of human beings” (Sofola 10). It is, in a guise, a reclamation, of a

past, “in the face of that past’s inevitable otherness which can be reclaimed but never reconstituted” and which can be “revisited and realized in partial, fragmented ways” as Lye avers in “Some Issues in Post Colonial Theory.”

This is what the Cean dialogues, employing the natural environment, appear to accomplish. Beginning with *An African Eclipse* (2000), Ce dialogues on the process of “decolonization (which) historically went hand in hand with past and present efforts at neo-colonialism” and “cultural obliteration” by the dominant powers of Europe and America. His re-engagement of the “past” in *Full Moon* collection is best perceived as a continuance of the resistance which, from Lye’s Post Colonial theory, “carries with it ideas about human freedom, liberty, identity, individuality based on the affirmation of natural affinities.” There is a rising recognition that the “fragmentations” arising from historical process are “missing link(s) within the framework of higher values” (Asouzu 393) which help us to recognize and place their worth both in the limited constructs of time and space and the broader framework of existence. Ce’s poetry then becomes one of the signposts of “radical postmodernism” calling attention to “those shared sensibilities which cross the boundaries of class, gender, race etc., that could become fertile ground for the construction of empathy - ties that would promote recognition of common commitments and serve as a base for solidarity and coalition” (hooks 344).

Full Moon, published 2001, consists of thirty-eight poems divided into five sections, “New World,” “Full Moon,” “Truth Lovers,” “Vistas,” and “Midday.” It has witnessed a little revision in the 2008 *Complete Volume*

Poetry featuring the entire collections of *Full Moon*, *An African Eclipse* and *Millennial*. In craft the new edition has a marked restraint of diction, syntactic ordering, and clearer thought sequencing. Despite the restraint and compaction, however, it is to the poet's credit that all the poems in the first edition have been retained and no new poems are added. Moreover, the overall African treatment of art as psychologically redemptive still remains. All the poems are linked by their observance of life and existence projected from doubly differentiated perceptions of self and natural environment. Ce continues his *Eclipse* dialogue in this collection with cinematic dissolution and merging of personalities, perspectives, consciousnesses and identities. It is a technique he employs in novel dimensions and for similar effects in his later work *The Visitor* (2005). In *Full Moon* the result of this experimentation is the "production" and presentation of "fluid" identifiers, of "utterance" and "voice," from which we perceive two different characteristics and identities of self. Patricia Waugh's observation that "parts of other people, the parts we have had relationships with, are parts of us, so the self is both constant and fluid, ever in exchange, ever re-describing itself through its encounters with others" (337) finds credence here. In this study it is not only parts of other people but nature, events and ideas that also affect us in many ways.

Unlike the character in *The Visitor* whose identity, a dizzying metamorphosis of future, past and present, takes him beyond the spectrum of human personality, in *Full Moon*, we encounter a determinate concretion consistently referred to as "I" or "eye" that constantly

merges personality and identity with natural objects and their attributes. This feature is consistent in three sections of the collection, “New World,” “Truth Lovers” and “Midday.” It is through this “voice” that the audience is admitted into the *Moon* world.

The imaging of self located mostly in the poems in the section -“New World,”- projects a persona, free, alone; an individual represented through “I”/ “eye” that ranges and roves a wide expanse of space in its many quests. “Inspiration,” the first poem, introduces this intricate relationship where man and nature become both perceiver and perceived, “reflector and reflected” (Marques 27) through a fluid stream of ideas emerging “like molten gold...Snake-soft transparency/...along the garden/ park of pink and pollen grains” and “ripples...as red rose buds/... green grasses/...spilling streams and/ murmuring brooks” mingling “in the music of the flowing/ wind” (11).

From this point on we encounter various references to an identity comprehensible as the super-ego, but more endearing and more spiritual. The multiple references to self here -the greater Self- always come in conjunction with nature (sun, moon, water, fire, mountain, plants, animals, etc.) and coalesce in this huge, expansive and free being, immortal and timeless in the womb of eternity. The linguistic referents to this “I” is realised by a reliance on nature from which it pivots, projects, and expands its thoughts. For instance, we perceive below a relationship between the persona, the sun, and the feeling of omnipresence and omniscience established by his identification and appropriation of solar qualities and attributes: “I am the single eye on/ mountain range/

glazing eyes of the sun/ .../ I am the silent one/
fathomless to human race” (8). From this sensation of multiple identities, the poet touches upon the source of divination which goal, as Bloom imputes, is “to attain a power that frees one from all influence, but particularly from the influence of an expected death, or necessity for dying” (243), and even from the limitations of history. Hence “divination in this sense is both a rage and a program, offering desperate intimations of immortality through a proleptic magic that would evade every danger, including nature itself” (243).

With these intimations, the poetics traverse the abyss of time and eternity as in Jung’s “pre-human” or “super-human” worlds of contrasting light and darkness, the ultimate primordial world which “rend from top to bottom the curtain upon which is painted the picture of an ordered world, and allow a glimpse into the unfathomed abyss of what has not yet become” (178). With self and nature the Cean dialogues embrace the “timeless/ deep beyond” (eternity) where dwells the “silent fathomless one” (13), and where he/ she interacts and exerts his/ her influence on the different role-plays of life-times. This rather ancient notion of re-birth in African culture, where Self approximates the immortal Soul, expectedly introduces the trope of ‘journey.’ Thus at other times, the “I” becomes the eternal journeyman whose mission is to garner the ‘gold’ of experience from multiple lives. The journey as employed in Ce’s *Full Moon* and *The Visitor* highlights the necessity of this rite of passage via frequent visitation missions from the higher dimensions. It evokes an ontological universe of ‘market places’ and transitory phases: “I have sailed to distant lands/ .../I

have come from far away..." (6); "I am traveller of highways...I am the dream still like the night..." (11). The ebullience of spirit, "to fly with wings that reach/ the wind and well beyond/ this track of time" (10), while situating the achievements beyond the mundane, synchronises with Lawrence Grossberg's observations about "the Post-Modern sensibility" which, as quoted in bell hooks, "appropriates practices as boasts that announce their own -and consequently our own- existence, like a rap song boasting of the imaginary (or real -it makes no difference) accomplishments of the rapper" (345). Such practices "offer forms of empowerment not only in the face of nihilism but precisely through the forms of nihilism itself: an empowering nihilism, a moment of positivity through the production and structuring of affective relations" (345).

The affirmations in *Full Moon* are further witnessed as an appropriation of roles which could well prove another index for auxiliary identifications: "I am the holder of the word/ I am the bearer of the light.../ I am the carrier of the call.../ I am he who stoops to conquer..." (9). It is noteworthy that these roles, sacrosanct in nature, are undertaken on behalf of a humanity that can barely understand the importance of the message. From this stance of godly omniscience, omnipotence and omnipresence, the persona observes the affairs of those he sometimes scoffs and derides as a result of their attachments to power plays: "Down the earthen cavern/ where life is dark/ and mind is a game" (4). The foregoing restriction and stultification of mankind are easily recognised as diseases of minds described as empty and dark, as in the absence of light: "Down the

crowded streets below/ lie tainted garments/ by splush of dirt/ and winged flights impaired/ by missiles launched/ from dark minds” (10). From his vantage knowingness, the persona sees only fragmentations and fruitless pursuits of power: “I can look the raving tyrant in the eye/ And see the yawning emptiness in his glare/ For gone is the wind from too many prophets/ who struggle for all the heaven’s seats” (7). He evokes in us the feeling to always heed the call of “soul which haunts (the) wild and restless mind” (7). It is an inspiration to overlook the vagaries of existence and overcome limitations by the recognition and affirmation of soul’s unbound freedom, its boldness to “build... dream(s)/ on the hills beyond the rising sun” (7). It is an undying hope where humans must reframe the past as forfeited: “Done’s the dance of yester years/ so the sins of bygone days” and rely on the knowledge that the present is all there is for the processes of transformation: “Now the drumbeats in the nights/ Toll the hope of future times” (9).

Soon the “Dream” becomes the symbol of spiritual quests -love and freedom- the pre-occupation of the second section “Full Moon.” Here the supremacy of the heart is frequently reaffirmed by the ‘waiting’ persona who is feeling “the radiant light of love” “over my head/ and around my cheeks” (15). His /her heart “takes a leap/ when the warmth.../stirs the embers.../which sparked and glowed/ in the wind” (22). Hereafter we are to encounter further drapery over the self which admits of human frailty in its diversion into emotional love. Freedom as earlier perceived is curtailed by anxieties about delays in the long-in-coming-encounter which marks the fruit of companionship. Now the “I”-identity is

burdened by limitations and other mental engagements in passive contemplation: “What can be said of love that lived/ deep in our hearts and gave radiance/ to the beauty and luminance of our souls?” (21) -like the Shakespearean persona in Sonnet 29 who “trouble deafe heaven with my bootless cries/ and looke upon my selfe and curse my fate” but quickly reconsiders his fortunes as he remembers his beloved: “For thy sweet love remembered such wealth brings/ that then I skorne to change my state with kings” (1228).

The novelty of the experience, the uncertainty of a chosen course -loving as a complement for the messenger in nirvana- are communicated through the contrasts of maturity suggested by fullness/ wisdom of ‘moon’ and folly/ naivety suggested by ‘youth’ and time: “Full moon shines upon the dream/ of youth/ and wisdom may take its time”(33). Hence the reading by Eke that these lines “show that one moment of communion with the great moods and beams of moonlight can generate enough ‘wisdom’” (186) misses the point when it locates the ‘moon’ as the object of love, and ‘wisdom’ as the fruit of the enterprise. Rather we can agree that in nature, “separation and objectivity rather than relationship and connection become the markers of identity” (Waugh 337). In the Cean dialogues, nature appears with varying and differing identities. Sometimes its attributes are used to evoke the moods of the persona. But as Eke rightly observes, “in Chin Ce’s poetic universe, mind and nature act and react upon each other to generate a network of pleasure and pain” (185), rarefied with ‘fire’ and ‘heart,’ ‘night’ and ‘death,’ ‘loneliness,’ ‘heat,’ ‘sun’ and ‘earth:’ “I am crackling by the fireside/ burning and scalding/

From the earthen heat/ Of my smouldering heart” (25). “The night is still/ and the faithful watchmen screech/ like vigilantes of the dead” (15). “Those moments were lonely days/ drowsing under the wooden shade/ the sun relentlessly frowned/ down on a fast scorching earth” (19). Other times nature seems to come secondary as its primal beauty is supplanted by the sheer power of self reflections and declamations: “And my solitary wanderings/ carry your lingering presence/ as the fresh morning flower...” (26). “The night is the dawn/ of your never-ending love/ as it comes surrounding me” (15). “Your laughter the beautiful/ symphony/ under the shelter of our tree” (18). Thus nature’s brilliance is shared with positive human attributes in order to highlight the latter’s unparalleled beauty: “Soon it will be night/ when the sun goes down/ and the wind brings/ stale gusts from the sea”; “but when will you be home/ with that smile that pours/ your love into my world?” (16-17). With this, we can deduce that our frenzied “waiting” and anticipations for fulfilment often result in disillusionment, reducing our moods to spasms of fretting and worrying over delays or separations from the objects of our desire.

The irritability of this persona is communicated by vague references to long distances, aimlessness, loss, and loneliness: “I wish you were here now...” (20); “waiting for you/ to return from the trip to town/ now like a distant journey” (16); “Each night have I wandered/ in the thicket of my mind/ when I sought your arms.... Night again do I thirst/ like a lost lamb” (25). This other identity emerges from an aspect of human mind which frets and worries in its singular objective of

accomplishing a desired goal. Here the initial composure and self-assurance of the soul are obviously lacking, leaving us with a lower self that doubts its quests and queries the chances of success.

Such ambiguity in the treatment of nature is characteristic of several African poets. Mwangi on *ASLE Online* observes that “in her writing, Zimbabwean poet Kristina Rungano invokes the environment in the form of grass, trees, butterflies, and the weather to comment on political and social issues facing her nation and underline the possibilities of the end of the prevailing confusion.” And in his observation of the treatment of nature in Osundare’s poetry, Jeyifo notes:

the poet’s observant, sensitive eye on nature yields the insight that the processes of the natural world correspond to the wishes and yearnings of the heart and, by extension, the will to change, the will to freedom. Contrastively, evocations of seasons of natural dryness and blight on the land, in other poems, lead the poet to muse on the ‘unnatural’ deserts and scarcities created by man. (xiii)

The projection of the higher Self in nature returns in the succeeding section, “Truth lover.” Here the tribute is to beloved “Truth” with which several illuminations, as can be gleaned from the action, have taken place. It is a projection of the soul, not only as the recipient of love that lights “up the fire” as “a shining aurora” (49) but, more importantly, as the adumbration and declamation of the divine essence at-one with mother Earth: “The wind and tide shall rise/ to her name, the swans/ of the skies far

as Everest's cold peaks/ shall rally round to beckon she/
who dwells in a heart dancing/ and swirling with the
chirruping/ birds" (48). In the suggestive motions of 'she'
is the intermingling with wind, birds and water in
timeless loving rhythms. Here we notice the perfect
synchronism of Self and nature. The meeting of lover and
beloved is divine in its subliminal moments whose
illumination unearths "errors of bygone days/ shoddily
buried/ in layers/ of mind's frenzied heaps" and
"unbolt(s)" the "songbird" in the heart (53). As the
persona attests: "eyes sired in/ myriad/ tongues of flame/
have burned in mine/ to sear my heart/ and rend/ the veil
of existence/ bare, and naked" (51). It is a union that is
both revealing and purifying: "nothing/ like your gaze
that lifted/ the veil/ and underneath is the pearl of the
world" (54). A new harmony lies in self sacrificial divine
nature and we arise into immortality even as we
constantly contemplate the intricate relationships existing
among all of creation, and not just the beloved subject.
This challenges the possessive human effort at trapping
and owning the object of love, imposing on it the
limitations of the lover instead of awaiting the
transformation and purification that comes with loving
purity. From this high "shamanistic stance" (Sanyal 101),
Ce once again shines upon the caverns of human mind
the illuminated glare of divine purpose responding to
relationships with itself, between people and all things.

The section "Vistas" brings us to the strange
objectification of nature: awesome, frightening, terrifying
and a "potentially callous force" (Eke 188): "Out there in
the dim/ row of distant hills/ shadows menacing mock
my balls/ and cold death lurk in the shadows" (72). The

certainty of destruction initiated by nature's cyclic cleansing is expanded in not just the cataclysmic end of a mythical civilisation but, more importantly, the survival of humankind in the renewed environment of "patches of dotted land/ ready for the first strike of a farmer's hoe" (74) -the return to the Age of the Earth. On the destruction of Atlantis, the clinically detached description of events reveals an underlying relationship between the action and a higher, greater order "as jagged rocks crumbled slowly/ Swallowed in darted tongues as of raven/ and thousand hands torn from useless straws/ to disappear with the gurgle of the seas" (73). It indicates that these events are not "accidents of nature" by revealing angelic presences: "three set against the storm/ gliding across the face of the sea" and who, taking their positions "at the zeniths of the mountain range/ and placid...", "watched the show beneath/ while beyond a city of gleaming lights/ awaited the million vistas of dying men" (74).

Our earlier identification with nature is replaced here with awe of her perturbations. Nature images are now projected in disconcerting motions: "the dusty blur of leaves/ fleeting fronds/ and racing clouds/ take their flight"; "harmattan's misty eye" "slapping rush/ of violent wind/ whirling away my breath" (67). Even in the supposed admiration of Jos rocks, the association of its passivity with laziness, boredom, dreariness and blindness is not lost on a keen reader: "Crouched and slumbering/ In the Northern heat.../ How long shall be the meditation/ ...giants, bored and/ (all around the greenery)/ barely seeing?" (64). Ce seems to be saying that in our perception of human relationships, we must

embrace the emotive bifurcation of positive and negative wavelengths. On the one extreme we can appreciate the friendship and filial love: “And here so affectionately your goodwill/ Tingle like golden music bells/ When they come ringing in my heart/ Like giggles of long-gone years” (65); “May this nimble hands of mine/ fill your loyal hearts/ with whistles of my love/ postal man” (69). The temporality and cycles of life and relationships are acknowledged in the declamation: “We only part to meet again/ but long shall live our dreams” (69). These dreams are but loving and caring gestures that make us divine: “Let my heart pulse to your/ love always/ even as the days remain blessed/ with echoes of your parting steps”; “let my heart be the gate/ open to my lover’s heart” (69). On the other hand, we must acknowledge the acute severances of bonds and human disillusionments -much more fully explored in *Millennial*, the triad of Ce’s volumes. However, the general panacea to the human condition in *Full Moon* is underscored by echoes of the soul’s return from temporality: “They fly away-memories/ in the mental screen/ and a chapter of life/ shall be finished/ with the journey’s end” (68).

In the last section, “Midday,” we meet again the self who dwells in “Shining myriad visions/ of light/ A beauty as glorious/ as the sphere...” (85). Humans are, again, much larger than life: the heroic image and “Truth” of deity. We are witnesses to this recognition in another sequence of the simultaneous merging of poetic feelings in nature: “I can see the being in you/ ...that speaks/ this gurgling rush of love....This steady gaze of dearest you/ Like an open page”; “In this dot of shimmering light/ Innocence lies like a flower bud” (79).

Then come these affirmations of goodwill and blessings: “immerse me/ in the river of the valley/ filled with ripples/ of ever flowing love” (83); “thus too have the lamp/ of our fathers/ lighted our paths...Thus may the brilliance of the heart/ brighten your days (78). A reminder of our collective heritage comes with the rhetorical sum of the Cean dialogue: “And what are you, soul /but the joy and freedom of your being?” (82).

From these interchange, enduring counsels are delivered: “shun the vanity/ of hypocrites and/ clay footed gods.../ for here between light and dark/ lies the bridge; beyond:/ the dazzle flight of angels” (81); “Look not to mind’s fragments/ remember the call/ far away to be that who/ intrepid must one day alight/ before the Host of Truth” (84). Eke has observed that one feature which Ce’s poetry “shares with the dramatic monologue is the single speaker who pretends to be interacting with a personified object of admiration” (187). This element of the dramatic places the audience as both eavesdropper and participant (impliedly) in the engagements of the poet-personae. Ce deploys different identities for the major voice. The similarity in manners of affirmative voicing and utterance leads to an identification of a character with dual attributes -divine and human- who arrives exactly and very timely at the point of a poetic contextualisation. It evokes the Jekyll and Hyde facades of Stevenson’s novel examined in *Encarta* as the duality of human nature based on psychoanalytical constructs of the balanced, “civilized, rational, restrained person and the uninhibited core -the potential for physical, moral, and intellectual evil- that lies beneath.” In Ce’s dialogues, however, we encounter a reverse of this assumption as

balance and freedom are situated upon the Superego (Soul) while the civilized, rational, restrained person is full of potential evil. Here the actions of nature border upon the tension between two personality types. As of godliness with infinity of perspectives and possibilities, this higher Self gives the message of hope anchored on the recognition of its essence in spirituality, hence the powers to overcome limitations of all kinds and embrace the higher loving forces as the natural way. Yet as earthly humans with but limited physicality of perceptions, we embrace a fragmented psyche that worries and frets in anxiety and uncertainty for friends, relations and beloveds. From the preceding therefore, dual landscapes or environments are vividly drawn on the poetic canvass -the natural human environment and the higher divine Self.

The consistency of character delineation nearly makes their portraiture seem as types; however, the complexities and varieties of their contextuality would negate such an assumption. The natural environment evokes the world of plants (as flowers), mountains, space, stars, water, moon, sun, fire, night, the gods, and eternity. It insists upon an investigation and interrogation of the intricate relationships between us and all nature. It is a world of height, space, and light that spark the truth and freedom of life. This natural landscape often comes alive through its infusion with divine sensitivity. Space is communicated by traversing mountain ranges to experience the endlessness of nirvana and its fluid limitlessness “in the heart of distant lands” (18). Space is the expanse or vacuum, the void as well as boundlessness and, above all, the presence of godhood from which

nature is sprung, and which is proposed as transcending history.

This world of light and shimmering brilliance occurs repeatedly; it is variously suggested by images of sun, moon, stars, and fires which survive as abodes of truth, love and freedom. Tropes drawn from nature are used profusely in communicating poetic feelings and visions. Ideas of maturity and beauty come with the full moon that “shines upon the dream/ of youth/ and wisdom may take its time” (33). The moon is also the symbol of maternal affection and romantic relations: “Your hands, full moon/ of the still nights” (83); “I have watched your crescent/ Calling forth full of joy .../and soon your full-rounding/ will cast a golden spell/ upon my tender eyes” (61). Night comes with variations of ‘darkness,’ ‘stillness,’ ‘calmness,’ ‘peace,’ ‘restfulness,’ etc., delineating the complexities of nature: “Let the wind carry the voice/ through the deep and silent nights” (17); “Now the drumbeats in the nights/ toll the hopes of time’s long lines” (17); “The night is the dawn/ of your never-ending love” (23); “Each night have I wandered/ in this thicket...”; “Each night did I thirst/ like a lost faraway lamb...” (37).

The higher states of aloneness and individuality are further suggested as the eternal condition: “I have come from far away/ in my loneliness” (19). In a positive sense, this implies freedom and self reliance as conceptualised by Western Romantics of the 19th century. Light and shimmering brilliance occur variously through sun, moon, stars, and fire, alongside notions of brightness, brilliance and dazzling beauty. For Ce “Dreams” can only find their corollary in humanity,

divinity and eternity all joining into the divine imagination. As we see from the following extractions, “the animate always had priority, (and) death is only a failure of imagination” (Bloom 243): “howling winds haunt/ ...dreams bringing echoes of distant/ lands” (14); “and the eye of the sun/ shall calcify the dream” (20); “Out of my closet dances my dream/ joyfully” (23); “We only part to meet again/ but long shall live our dreams” (69); “Like the regular throb of our hearts/ filled with the distant dreams...”; “and herein lies everything/ ...when leeward/ we sail in dreams renewed” (41).

A rather significant nature-magic symbol is the “eye” as a point of perception, a unit of awareness and penetration: “Your eyes are clear/as the waters of *nkume*” (53); “In your eyes, I/ swim in purest atoms/ of shimmering lights” (53); “my single eye/ pierces ...your mask” (71); “Eyes that pierce/ the body’s dross/ and dazzle the gaze/ as thousand suns” (51); “I am the single eye/ on the mountain range/ ...the glazing eye of the sun” (16). By constant recourse to the implied deeper perceptions from the gaze we conclude that these denote not the physical eye(s) but contact centres for the spirit. ‘Waves,’ ‘water,’ and ‘wind’ sustain the perceptive fluidity of divine motion. Once again, this graceful movement echoes the permeation of void and space within the spiritual, of which the Soul, being honoured here, is its intrinsic part. All through these referents, the natural elements point to human restlessness for the eternal which: “turn our blood as surging waves/ and our mind ...the enchanted dance” (31); “in million light/ waves and coruscating/ rhythms of life without end” (51); “beside the silent waters/ Listening to the music that

rings/ within” (47); “The wind in her wings.../ till the very end of time” (49).

Clouds also come as prophetic omens: “a dark cloud dangles/ Over the minds of mortal men” (16); “the cloud thicken in fright/ be the carrier of the call” (17); “Elemental rioters and prodigal clouds/ flee the turbulent ether” (72). Here, aloneness (not individualism) is suggestive of the eternal existence: “I have come from far away/ in my loneliness” (19); “I, traveller of the highway/ long for the guiding song” (18); “alone in the world’s very heart” (47); “but you stand alone: the/ fires of truth/ guard your endless dreams” (46). With human nature we can have acute loneliness, boredom and worry as indices of psychic fragmentation: “Those were lonely moments/ drowsing under the wooden shade...”; “and my solitary wanderings/ carry your lingering presence” (39). The conditions of spiritual aloneness and human loneliness serve as requisites for higher truth and spiritual freedom. Thus the goal of oneness or wholeness -unity- as a natural condition is reached only when one conquers the hysteria and confusion of the outside force -the herd instinct. Within humanity, consistently referred to as the ‘herd,’ is the “cavern/ where life is dark” (12). In this world, ‘brave lions’ (warriors) fight the foe, emptying ‘kegs of wine’ into the pit of their bellies, eagerly waiting for other seasons of carousal. Here is a “winding maze” (85) where dwells “Maya” (illusion) and the “lies” which she needs must wear “to confront a world/ brewed in (fearsome) imagination” (71). Life or existence here is temporal: “We only part to meet again” (69), cast in charted phases called ‘chapters’ which, although

“embodied/ in this chapter” (79), “shall be finished/ with the journey’s end” (68).

From the intimations of the godlike self, humans are simultaneously frequenting the worlds of light and the cavernous physical existence of hardened mind sets. The preference of individual freedom and divinity acts as Jameson’s call for a “cultural revolution as a strategy for breaking the immemorial habits of subalternity and obedience which have become internalized as a kind of second nature in all the laborious and exploited classes in human history” (302). Nothing should be allowed to encumber the process of transformation, as Ce avers: “nothing shall hold my hand/ to surf the waves against the cloud/ with the wind beneath my wings” (19).

Cean dialogues tend to be richly and deeply experiential, appealing to sensibilities of the visual, tactile and imaginative in their engagement with relationships and environments human and natural. One can agree no less with Marques who sees in them a revolutionary approach to mind and history:

The poet’s mind becomes the mind of nature, or even more, the mind of the cosmos, the mind of the beyond. To satisfy a visceral anthropomorphic and transcendental need, the mind of the poetic subject becomes the very being of nature, or the very being of the universe at large, with rivers and trees, boats and harmattan(s), suns and moons, clouds and skies becoming mirrors of the deep sensibilities and desires of the poet, of his need to travel through the confines of time, space and material reality. (27)

Chapter 14

Musical Poesies

Okuyade, O and M. Mowarin

THERE is a parallel movement discernable in the artistic vision of recent Nigerian popular musicians. While socially and politically conscious, they are equally moving towards a more radical and revolutionary direction. Their songs have become the agency for resisting the marginal status conferred on the people by postcolonial political arrangements. As people who negotiate their existence around the margins and the abject corners of the society, they understand the unstable pulse of the Nigerian political system. Thus morally and culturally the music exhibits traits of "revolutionary traditionalism" (Sharma 22). The medium of expression and the dance that accompanies this genre of music are what define its traditionalism. So an understanding of this music is an important index of the awakening of the people to historical realities and the socio-political failure of their government. The music does not only accentuate

the fact that Nigeria is in tentative stability, but makes emphatic that it is a space where survival has become a mortal challenge.

Scholars and critics have continued to insist over the years that Africa inherited corruption from the bureaucratic ordering of colonial powers dangerously moored on capitalist exploitation. But the theme of corruption is not concern of this paper; rather it provides a theoretic of the conflict between leaderships and the arts in Africa, especially between Nigerian politicians and popular Nigerian musicians. This approach will equally answer a barrage of puzzles as to why African leaders are unable to deliver any so-called dividends of self-rule? Why do bad policy, corruption, and venality seem so endemic? Why are African states so ineffective? And Chin Ce's important question on the significance of art in the well being of the society: "...how further has the ... aesthetics [emphasis added] gone towards the education of society or the political reengineering of the continent?" (4).

Josaphat Kubayanda argues that literary production and criticism actually are "an integral part of the process of state formation, for at the heart of the polemic is the search for new political orders for a continent ... desperately in need of social change" (8). Because of the lack of political will of Africa's rulers, the artists are now the pulse of the continent, indicating routes and leeway from the gross failure of fiscal institutions engendered by lack of commitment and focus by government. The insistence by the African artist not only on foregrounding the pedagogical province of art, but capturing the realities of everyday existence in the post colony, and refusing to

be subjected to the status of 'passive morons' like the masses, no doubt, pits him against the government. For the African artiste, defiance has become a stock in trade as they continue to excoriate the cruelty of government. Forging oeuvres contoured with defiant resistance bequeath the artist with the portrait of an insurgent. The counter-narrative of his music has thence emerged to challenge the nationalized versions of Nigerian culture and histories widespread in Nigeria's official discourses or dominant ideologies. The concept of counter-narratives as employed here differs from Ashcroft et al's definition of the term as stories, expressions, or languages of critique, demystification, and agency capable of contesting dominant oppressive practices and ideologies. The idea of music as counter-narrative spans beyond the colonized/colonizer binary. The Nigerian guerrilla hip-hop does not engage in any conversation with the "centre" but it dialogues with and confronts the politics of everyday life in the postcolony (Nigeria). If postcolonialism, specifically the counter-discourse/narrative paradigm, is a strategy committed to the transformation of "the conditions of exploitation and poverty in which large sections of the world's population live out their daily lives" (Young 6), the emergent popular music in Nigeria is undoubtedly then its unequivocal signification. Such is the extent to which creative artistic expressions articulate an alternative narrative of Nigerian culture, and potentially mobilize the people to resist a single government definition of national culture. The importance of turning to the artist for alternative discourses, especially as they now function as memory which help society to provoke consciousness, is

aply articulated in Roy Heath's mythical rhetoric where he argues that, "it is our creative artists, our writers, painters, sculptors, and musicians that we must look to rebuild a shattered tradition..." (91). The artist can therefore not pretend to be unaware of what transpires in his society.

The China Lyric

In contemporary Nigerian music, the most socially conscious musician among the pack seems to be African China. The protestation of his music is direct; his music attacks government openly. This direct confrontation with government has endeared his music to the majority of the people. As a musico-historian, he documents national issues through music, thereby performing the function of memory. China's commitment to bearing his mind on the political and sociological aspects of life in Nigeria adds a whole other dimension to his music, demonstrating his unique human, social and communal devotion through his music. Since his debut album, *Crisis*, became an instant hit in Nigeria, he has been the eye, ear and mouth of Nigeria's oppressed and disenfranchised, lifting his voice and exposing the antics and deception of Nigeria's nascent democracy since 1999.

China is so heavily obsessed with the plight of the lowdowns of his society; his music rages at blatant inequities in postcolonial Nigeria, especially in the distribution of resources. There is the pervading burden of memory in his song which brings to the fore Nigeria's tortured trajectory. In *Crisis*, his first album, China, heavily resonant of the late Reggae king, Bob Marley,

gives a run down of the dangers in living in Nigeria as an underprivileged or oppressed person:

Your worst enemy go be your
best friend
Every night and day
We de think of our daily bread
You never can tell
Who go be your best friend
You never can tell
When the world e go end

This aptly captures the reasons why the Nigerian federation, close to fifty years after independence, still remains dangling in uncertainty, reminding how Chinua Achebe lamented that there “is nothing basically wrong with the Nigerian land or climate or water or air or anything else. Nigeria's biggest problem remains the unwillingness or inability of the leaders to rise to their responsibility, to the challenge of personal example which are the hallmark of true leadership” (1).

China's songs “Crisis” and “Mama” abound with features of orality. The major theme in the two songs is the multifarious problems plaguing Africa due to political misrule. Like Fela Anikulapo Kuti, the precursor of “galala” music, African China chronicles the socio-economic events in his country in particular, and in the continent in general. Galala musicians are also known as ragga/reggae artists; their music is a fusion of reggae and afro beat. Their lyrics are rendered mainly in Nigerian Pidgin although there are cases of code-mixing English

and Nigerian languages with Nigerian pidgin in their music.¹

Three sub-themes emerge from China's "Crisis" music album. First is the senseless killings orchestrated by an inordinately ambitious man who wants to become the Baale (traditional ruler) of Ajegunle in Lagos. The second is the sectarian religious riots in Kaduna in Northern Nigeria and the attendant loss of lives and property. The third is the problem of Sharia law in some northern Nigerian states. Below are the analyses of code mixing and other rhetorical device adopted by the musician to foreground these themes.

Standard English phrases in the album "Crisis"

Your best friend
Our daily bread
Some useless ones
Cannibal man
Inside Ajegunle

In S-A-P grammatical structure:

You / never can tell

In S-P-C grammatical structure:

It /is / a useless world.
Sharia law / is / a brand new one

A few cases of code mixing of English and NP lexemes in a sentence structure include:

You never can tell who go be your best friend.
After secondary school, my friend go kaduna.

In “Sweet Mama” there are also some predominately English phrases and sentences as shown in the phrases below:

Mother of Africa
Our Leadership
All the little children
All the black people

The art of code switching is a common phenomenon with popular singers. African China's continuous recourse to code mixing and code switching is indicative of his competence in Nigerian Pidgin most likely because he grew up in Ajegunle, a slum in Lagos mainland inhabited by people from the Niger Delta region. However one cannot use the songs as a parameter for evaluating his competence in NP partly due to the fact that the lyrics are not written. The first verse of “Crisis” discusses the nefarious act of the cannibal and the inordinately ambitious man who wants to become Baale in Ajegunle. On the cannibal, China sings.

Abi na di one of
Clifford Orji cannibal man
Wen dey chop man body o.

After describing the madness and mayhem unleashed on Ajegunle by a power-desperate felon, African China

encapsulate the events in Ajegunle with a syntactic and choral repetitions:

I say dem burn house
Dem kill man o for inside Ajegunle
I say dem burn house
Dem steal land o for inside Ajegunle.

This chorus foregrounds the crisis in Ajegunle as a metaphorical extension of the problems ravaging Nigeria in particular and Africa in general. The second verse discusses the murder of a child in nursery school. African China sings:

Nursery student wen e dey go learn
Omo na im dem kill.
(A pupil in nursery school,
On his way to school murdered.)

The third verse describes a young man of Igbo extraction from the South who went to the North to learn a trade in Kaduna. He and many others of his ethnic affiliation were caught in the recurrent Christian/Muslim crises in Kaduna and were all murdered. His corpse along with those of members of his ethnic group was brought home in a trailer. African China describes the situation in syntactic parallels thus:

Dem carry trailer (truck)
Dem land for our land
(They drove a truck
Right in our community)

Wetin we see?
human dead body!
Wetin China see
human dead body!
Wetin my brother see
human dead body!
Wen papa reach,
he see im pikin

The two sets of repetitions are followed by the chorus. The use of the pronominals “we” and “my brother” in the first and third sentence of the parallel structures give insight into the themes of the songs. The first set enables us to see through the eyes of the singer and all other indigenes of the predominantly Igbo extraction whose corpses brought home in a truck; this gives the incident an air of credibility, elicits the sense of sympathy. The second set of parallel structures gives a graphic picture of the sorrow of the father in his reaction on seeing his late son's corpse. The use of Igbo lexemes by the father of the late son helps to situate the scene of the incident.

The last set of parallel structures describes Sharia law introduced to some northern states by their governors. The tenet of this Islamic law is to reduce contact between men and women to minimum:

Sharia law is a brand new one.
Sharia law mak una hear dis one
Sharia law my God dem say
Woman and man no go sleep for one house.
Wetin dem say

Woman and man no go eat for the place.
(Sharia law is a brand new one
People need to know about this law
Oh my God, the promulgators of the
Law say that a man and a woman
Cannot live under the same roof
What did they say?)
A man and a woman cannot eat together.

This set of parallel structures satirises Sharia law by highlighting the separation of men and women to ludicrous levels since a man and woman can neither sleep in the same house nor eat from the same plate. The chorus also helps to foreground the abnormality of the economic, religious and socio-political situation in the country.

Another song in Crisis album “Sweet Mama” focuses on the problems plaguing the African continent. Africa is personified as sweet mother. The chorus of the song highlights the suffering of Africans thus:

I pray and I sing
Oh mama
Oh mother Africa
Your children dem are die and suffer
oh sweet mama
(I pray and sing
Oh mother
Your children are dying oh mother)

The first verse of the song discusses the problem of leadership in Nigeria thus:

In a dis country
We dem whole Nigeria
Look our leadership
Dem just dey scatter

This is followed by the plight of all black people in the world. This section gives the song its universal appeal.

And all the black people
Dem a come fighting
Shouting and killing
One another

This madness which has become the character of black folks around the world has been attributed to centuries of slavery, decades of colonialism and its concomitant post independence neo-colonialism. Rather than develop the continent, the neo-colonial rulers were interested in looting the continent's resources for personal aggrandizement. African China uses parallel structures to state how social deviants degenerate as armed robbers.

No mother
No father
No younger brother

As lack of parental care is the cause of criminality in the continent, so does it stall the economic development of the continent. The singer also highlights the plight of Africans through parallel structures.

Sweet mama, look at the children in sufferation
Sweet mama look at your children situation
Mama see the whole Africa in a tribulation

The predominant verbal word groups in the song are simple and highlight African conditions quite forcefully. They are 'suffer', 'killing "and fighting"'. African China even engages in morphological disruption by deriving a noun phrase from the verb 'suffer' when he uses the semi-literate word "sufferation".

In the song "Our Government Bad", the same rage at the bureaucratic inefficiency of government is noticeable. The inability of government to redeem their electioneering campaign promises occupies a central theme. The Nigerian government is characterized by politicians who over promise and under perform.

Our government bad Oh!
Dem no wan give ghetto man job oh
My God oh!
Cos if ghetto man no get work
My brother na how ego take survive oh.
(Our government is inhuman
They don't want to create jobs
If the poor have jobs
How can they survive?)

Besides detailing the hopelessness of survival in Nigeria, the song equally reveals the fact that squalor and poverty lay bare the Nigerian nation's oily façade, because the amoral political system on which Nigeria's democratic institutions rest lacks fiscal propriety. The

Nigerian democracy or political system seems to operate without ideology; if there was one, it is no doubt money-oriented. Since politics is regarded as a money making venture, ideology has thus been delegitimized. What becomes operational is the politics of money and personality. Corruption continues to thrive because public office holders see governance as a boneless elephant: What ever part the machete cuts is flesh, and thus, government becomes the short cut to affluence.

African China is thus a sensitive singer whose obsession for music that is people oriented has made him continue to search for different expressive media to orient the people about the dangers of the Nigerian brand of democracy. He adopts a technique of rendition which is characteristically his. He contrasts historical events which have become postcolonial indices with which to determine the growth of the individual as against that of the nation. His music enables an interface between the personal and national. In the perpetually evolving dialectics of human affairs there are numerous ways through which the experiences of the people dialogue with national experiences. Kofi Agawu aptly captures this function of the musician when he remarks that, “for an African composer it seems that the most important thing is ... to strive by every available means to capture in his music that cultural; or spiritual essence which pervades the African continent” (72). China's musical discourse and style has not only created an identity for him, but for his genre of music. Akin Euba accentuates this position when he argues that “in order to make an impact in Africa, composers need first to develop a voice

that speaks to Africans, and this leads to the question of identity” (119).

Notes and Bibliography

Section A 2 Fiction and Performance

Chapter 1 Jean Toomer

Notes

¹ For an appreciation of Toomer's life and career we have relied largely upon information contained in Darwin Turner's introduction to the 1975 edition of *Cane*.

² The spiritual quest of Toomer is akin to the quest informing *Cane*. The text reflects in a symbolic way, the writer's own quest and vision with regard to race, culture and freedom of the individual. Hence, we feel called upon to survey, however, extraneous, certain highlights of Toomer's own life.

³ Whether the text is a novel or not does not so much concern us as the focus on the ontological quest which is perceived as the cohesive strand giving the work its unity.

⁴ Regeneration and vision attained from "symbolic space" (where one is invisible) is a motif which runs through many African-American writing 'influenced' by Toomer, e.g. *Invisible Man*, *Native Son*, *Beloved*, *Mumbo-Jumbo*, etc.

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Chapter 2

Ngugi's Poetics

Notes

¹This refers to the character Kamiti who disguises as soothsayer under the eponymous name Wizard of the Crow to hoodwink the policeman Arigaigai Gathere.

²The name Karega means rebel in Kikuyu. He is a key character in Ngugi's *Petals of Blood*.

³The Wizard of the Crow therefore becomes an ambiguous name. It represents both Kamiti and Nyawira since she plays the role when Kamiti is away.

⁴The morphology of this name can also be likened to the 3rd person future tense of the Spanish verb “aburrirse”- to be bored. It could signify the exasperation of life under the dictatorship of a single leader. Many of the names in the text bear Spanish nomenclature (Santalucia church, Santa-Maria police station), which could be influenced by Ngugi’s current residence in Hispanic, dominated Irvine, California.

⁵The capitalized element represents the one with the greatest explanatory force, a decisive factor that affects the other elements of the paradigm.

⁶Probable pun on Smith Hempstone, US ambassador to Kenya who was very vocal in condemning the atrocities of Daniel Arap Moi and literally arm-twisted the latter into adopting multipartyism. See GBN Ayittey’s *Africa Betrayed* (p.350)

⁷[L’Etat postcolonial] Prétend détenir la vérité au sujet de la façon de nommer africain et son histoire, de le codifier, de découper l’espace, de l’unifier ou de le diviser. L’Etat-théologien, c’est l’Etat qui ne se préoccupe pas seulement des pratiques touchant à la distribution du pouvoir et de l’influence, aux relations sociales, aux arrangements économiques et aux processus politiques. Il se constitue comme le principe instituant des langages et des mythes d’une société (Mbembe1988 128)

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Chapter 3

Coetzee Enigma

Notes

1All subsequent references are from the edition *J. M. Coetzee, Doubling the Point: Essays and Interviews*. Ed. David Attwell. Cambridge & London: Harvard University Press, 1992.

2Rosemary Jolly in "Rehearsals of Liberation: Contemporary Postcolonial Discourse and the New South Africa." comments on Derrida's condemnation of apartheid which, unfortunately, unintentionally makes South Africa "spectacularly other" even as it distracts the reader away from the real culprits. Thus it

remarkably points out the inherent difficulties and dangers of such fraught enterprise.

3See Jane Poyner's introduction in *J. M. Coetzee and the Idea of the Public Intellectual*. Athens: Ohio University Press, 2006. Further, on many occasions Coetzee is tormented by the shadow of South Africa which doggedly followed his guilty conscience to the land of his refuge from the ominous political violence and the threat of conscription (as revealed in his *Youth*).

4Derek Attridge argues as much in his *J.M. Coetzee and the Ethics of Reading*. Although apart from the question of authority, it is more of a brusque erasure of the personal amid the tumultuous landscape of bloodletting and score-settling.

5See Lyotard's *Just Gaming* (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1985).

6See Elleke Boehmer's "Sorry, Sorrier, Sorriest: The Gendering of Contrition in J. M. Coetzee's Disgrace" in *J M Coetzee and the Idea of the Public Intellectual*. Ed. Jane Poyner, p. 145

7It explains his deeper need to escape the country and its distracting politics. It is antithetical to Nadine Gordimer's practice which has over the years been tacitly used to qualify the judgments passed on Coetzee.

8Coincidentally the idea is diametrically opposite to Conradian 'redeeming idea' of imperialism, which, in the end, proves hollow and full of "horror."

9See David Attwell's "'Dialogue' and 'Fulfilment' in J.M. Coetzee's Age of Iron." *Writing South Africa: Literature, Apartheid, and Democracy*. Ed. Derek Attridge and Rosemary Jolly, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998. p. 177

10Attwell refers to Coetzee's emphasis on the ethical "duty" of a need to go beyond imagining "subversion" to the "replacement," which amounts to reparation and re-formation.

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Chapter 4

Oyono's Old man, Ce's College youths

Note

1The slogan of “War against Indiscipline” was en vogue during the military regime of President Buhari of Nigeria. Enforced by his 'No. 2 strongman', Tunde Idiabon, it restored some civic discipline among the ordinary citizens while, paradoxically, senior government officials shamelessly pillaged the nation's economy.

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Chapter 5

Nadine Gordimer

Notes

1The noun "stroke" denotes the "act of hitting" as well as the act of "moving one's hand with gentle pressure over a surface" (OED).

2"Deterritorialisation" consists in proposing a new usage of language that undermines its internal stratification of reality. In Deleuze's and Guattari's terms, "the principal strata binding human beings" and undermined by "deterritorialisation" are "the organism, signification and interpretation, and subjectification and subjection" (A Thousand Plateaus 148).

3"Retour d'un astre au point d'où il était parti." Significantly, this meaning is inherent in the etymology of the word, i.e. the Latin expression "revolutionem," which means "to return."

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Doris Lessing and Bessie Head

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Chapter 7

Ambanasom, like Shakespeare

Note

1Kani's *Nothing but the Truth* embarks on new themes as he exposes the short-comings of reconciliation in post-apartheid South Africa: Many people, especially political leaders, fail to understand that there is need for reconciliation among Blacks. Selfish desires and corruption are recurrent in African leaders and keep them separated from the masses, making it difficult for true love and reconciliation. Similarly, Nkengasong in *Across the Mongolo* shifts from colonial and neo-colonial song to embrace new challenges of the conflict between

Black leadership and the masses. Ngwe the protagonist in the novel strives to fulfil his academic and social aspirations against the backdrop of repressive and corrupt government policy of the Republic of Kamangola, designed particular to crush Anglophones. In yet another instance Ambanasom's African background exemplified by the setting of Akaya's compound is closely related in colour and taste, to Oputa's compound in Ce's *Children of Koloko*. The squirrel hunt in *Son of the Native Soil* ties closely with Yoyo's adventure with ants in *Children of Koloko*. These sceneries play the same role in both novels -that of projecting African culture and values against a strong backdrop of urbanisation and westernisation.

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Chapter 8

Morrison and wa Thiong'o

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Chapter 9

Tanure Ojaide

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Section B- 2

Poetry and Performance

Chapter 10

Lianja Epic

Notes

1In the discourse placing mothers at the center of discussion and consideration, it is important to elucidate the meanings of the following terms: matriarchy, matrilineal, matrifocal, co-mothering, and mothering. Matriarchy implies a societal construction based on the political and ideological impact of the mother within the family and surrounding community. Matrilineal is a term used to describe lineage descendent through the mother. Matrifocal or matrifocality indicates that the mother is the focus or center of the discourse involved. These terms -matriarchy, matrilineal, and matrifocal- establish themselves within the biological privilege of motherhood through the act of child-birth. Acts of mothering, or co-mothering, then, do not necessary indicate motherhood, but indicate an expansion of self through nurturing others. They can be practiced by all peoples in a community,

regardless of age or gender, and are characterized by an egalitarian sense of responsibility and accountability.

2 In “Introduction” to *The Ancestors and the Sacred Mountain*, Mazisi Kunene discusses the importance of history, continuity, culture, and community to preserving the African classics found within the oral traditions. Kunene uses the term African classical literature to accommodate the oral and written forms of literary African texts.

3 The Lianja Epic is a text rich with centralized cultural value for the Congo region of central Africa (Maneniang', “Introduction”). This epic exists in several forms: as a communal performance in oral literature, as a dramatic performance produced for theater (Nkanga, “Interview”), and as a written form of what Mazisi Kunene (see second endnote above) would classify as African classical literature. The study by Mubima Maneniang' serves as the primary source examined in this paper. This written version chosen for the textual analysis is, according to the author, an amalgamation of various performances viewed, transcribed and translated by Mubima Maneniang'.

4 I have chosen to italicize the Mongo term for God with respect for Maneniang's textual references.

5 In his introduction, Maneniang' states: “With the themes of peace, unity and reconciliation at its centre, the epic has been passed down orally from generation to generation since around the 14th century, and is still popular today in the DRC where it is performed in both the city and country, and on radio and television. The Mobutu Sese-Seko National Theatre has also toured all over the world with their adaptation of *The Lianja Epic*.”

6 As Maneniang' points out, the duration of her pregnancy indicates its importance and not necessarily an actual amount of time.

7 See Oyewumi's remarks on *omo-iyá*, page 3.

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Chapter 11

Fela Anikulapo Kuti

Notes

- 1 A Yorùbá town in Ogun state of Western Nigeria.
- 2 Olukoye was studying medicine in England during this period
- 3 Fela's acronym for insult

4 A term used to describe a bad gang in the Yoruba speaking states in Nigeria

5 He was Fela's Baritone saxophonist in the 80s

6 Olubunmi Ette was the Speaker of the house of representatives in 2006 but was impeached as a result of financial misconduct

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Chapter 12

Archetypes for Enekwe

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Chapter 13

Cean Dialogues

Notes

1Watching Olivier's King Lear, Ralph Black makes the following cogent observations "...there is this transgression: the commodified landscape is sliced up and parcelled out to the highest rhetorical bidder. For a moment I wonder about my understanding of the tragedy, about what hubristic act instigates Lear's fall, about the significance of the natural world in the play, the moment of clarity that all seem to take place outside -in the storm, on the moors, at the seashore."

2The Nigeria-Biafra civil war (1967-1970) provides the historical index for the periodization of contemporary Nigerian poetry also known as "third generation" poetry, which poetic expression and exploration show much departure from earlier practice. For instance, Funso Aiyejina in his paper "Recent Nigerian Poetry in English: An Alter-Native Tradition" uses the term "alter-native" to express the marked "shift from the obscurantism and eurocentricism of most of the first generation of modern Nigerian poets." And in Biodun Jeyifo's "Introduction" to Niyi Osundare's Songs of a Market place he recognizes differences in the poetic art of "third generation" poets as against previous generation. These include distinctiveness of poetic expression that draws greatly from Africa's rich oral sources diffused through copious use of images, proverbs and aphorisms and thematic pre-occupation that explore "poverty, exploitation, corruption" as social concerns that affect people individually and collectively.

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Chapter 14

Musical Poesies

Note

1Galala, an offshoot of Fela's Afro beat music, had Daddy Shokey as its main exponent. Today the musicians are residents of Ajegunle, a suburb of Lagos. They are mostly of the Niger Delta, and committed to highlighting the political, economic and social ills of the nation.

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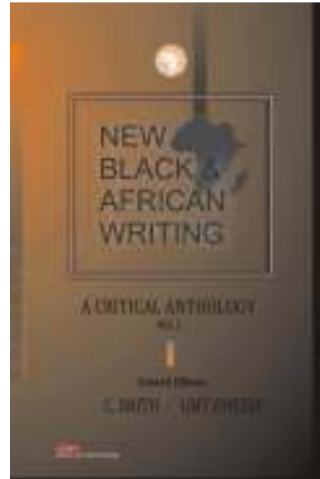
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